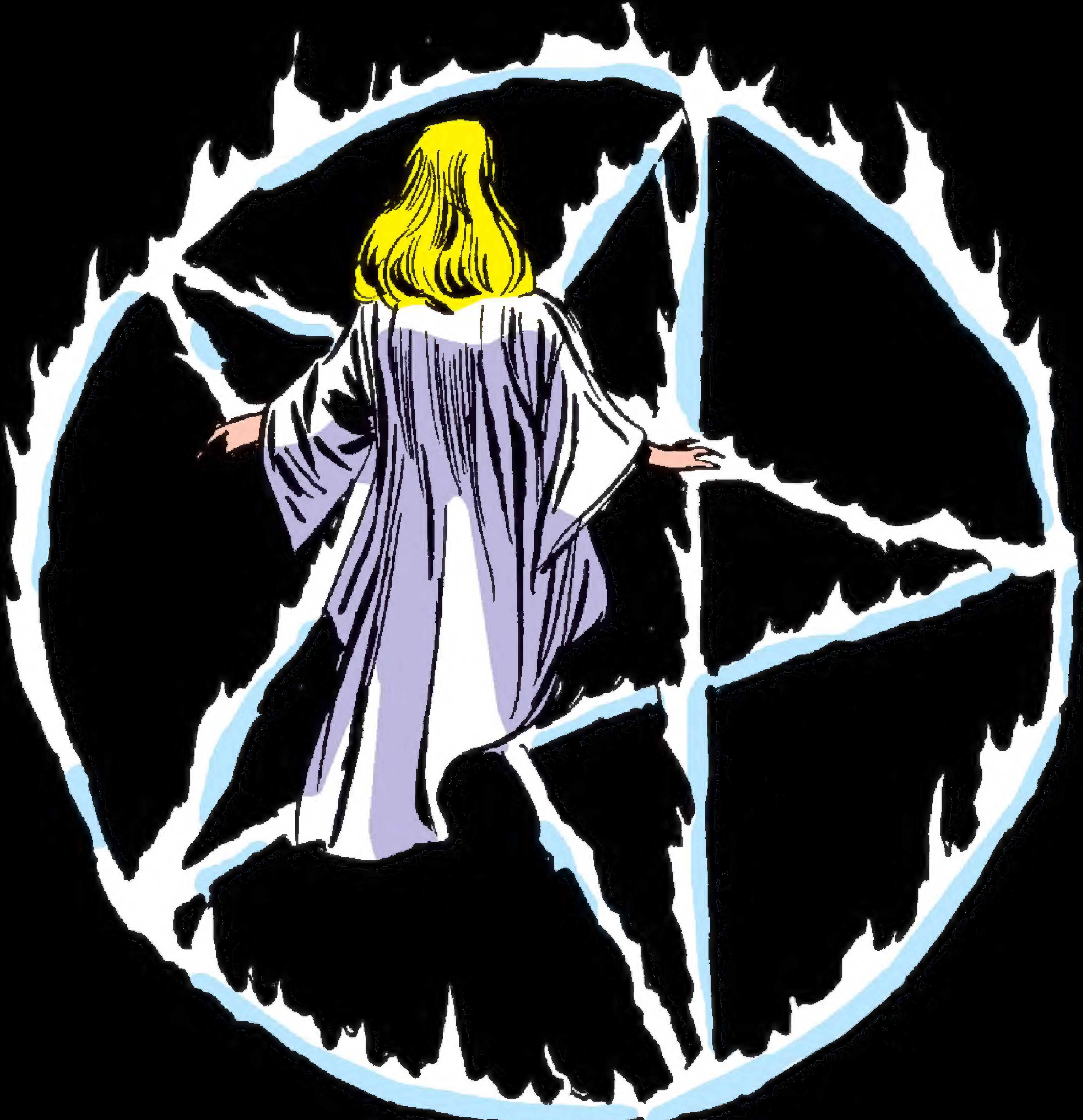
X-MEN®

MAGIK™

STORM & ILLYANA

MARVEL

X-MEN



MAGIK:
STORM & ILLYANA

X-MEN

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MAGIK: STORM & ILLYANA

INTRODUCTION

BY C.B. CEBULSKI

When it comes to comics, you can often judge a book by its cover. Or at least you think you can. Especially when you're 12 years old and just biked ten miles to the five-and-dime with your two-dollar allowance in your pocket to buy new funny books.

So there I was looking over the rack at the limited selection of comics I had to choose from one weekend in 1983. With comics at a whopping 60 cents apiece back then, I had to be ever so vigilant in my choices. At that time, books like *Uncanny X-Men, Alpha Flight, New Mutants, Thor, Rom* and *Fantastic Four* were all must-buys for me. But when I had some extra cash, and it came time to choose a couple of new titles to experiment with, covers played a vital role in my decision-making process. *Cloak and Dagger*, *The Falcon* and *Hawkeye* were all purchased solely based on their kick-ass covers. I didn't even have to open the comics, I knew just by looking at them I was in for a treat. And so it is that to this day, I can still remember not buying *Magik #1* because I did not care for the cover. To my young eyes, it featured strange versions of random X-Men characters I really didn't care that much about, all posed rather oddly in my opinion, with no one in particular jumping out at me. Why should I bother to pick that up? I could just tell it was gonna be boring. And besides, they spelled "magic" wrong.

Then, what I assume would have been a month or so later, I pedaled my way back down to the store again for new books. Sitting there this time was *Magik #2*. And right then and there it became obvious what a difference a cover can make! That second cover immediately caught my eye and made an instant impression. An evil Nightcrawler holding three swords (one in his tail!) fighting a clearly frightened young girl who looked about my age, with a crowd of demonic spectators (including Jabba the Hutt!) looking on, clearly hoping for spilled blood. Now that was a cover! SOLD! I went back and found the first issue, which I think the store still had if memory serves, and devoured them both. And that's how I fell in love with Illyana Rasputin.

I don't want to spoil anything for you here as you might be about to read this story for the first time, just like I did more than two decades ago, and I want your experience to be just as magical as mine was. (Or is it "magikal"? Magickal?) Magik is a story about a girl. It's a story about innocence. It's a story about loss. It's a story about growing up. It's a story about finding out who you are and what you are made of. And while this story might be supernatural, it's a story to which each and every one of us can relate. And that's what makes this series so special.

Chris Claremont, John Buscema, Ron Frenz, Sal Buscema and Tom Palmer are our guides on this adventure. It's their words and pictures that put us right there alongside Illyana as she makes her journey through Limbo to find the light inside the darkness and save her own soul. This *Magik* mini-series explores the ambiguities of adolescence and the meaning of maturity, masterfully disguised in the form of an X-Men comic book.

I remember the agony of finishing the third issue and realizing I had to wait a full month to discover the final fate of my "little snowflake." And when I finally did get a glimpse of the cover to the fourth issue, I remember my young self being crushed. "Did they really just spoil the end of the story for me on the cover?!" I thought. Well, I'll let you find out the answer to that question for yourself, but I will give you a hint…

Luckily, even in comics, sometimes you can't judge a book by its cover.

Soulfully,
C.B. Cebulski
New York City
Aug. 28, 2008

As an editor at Marvel Comics, C.B. Cebulski helped shepherd the Mangaverse and Ultimate Universe lines. As a writer, his credits include several creator-owned comics, the autobiographical Wonderlost, *Marvel's* Loners *and Image's* Compass.

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THE UNCANNY X-MEN™

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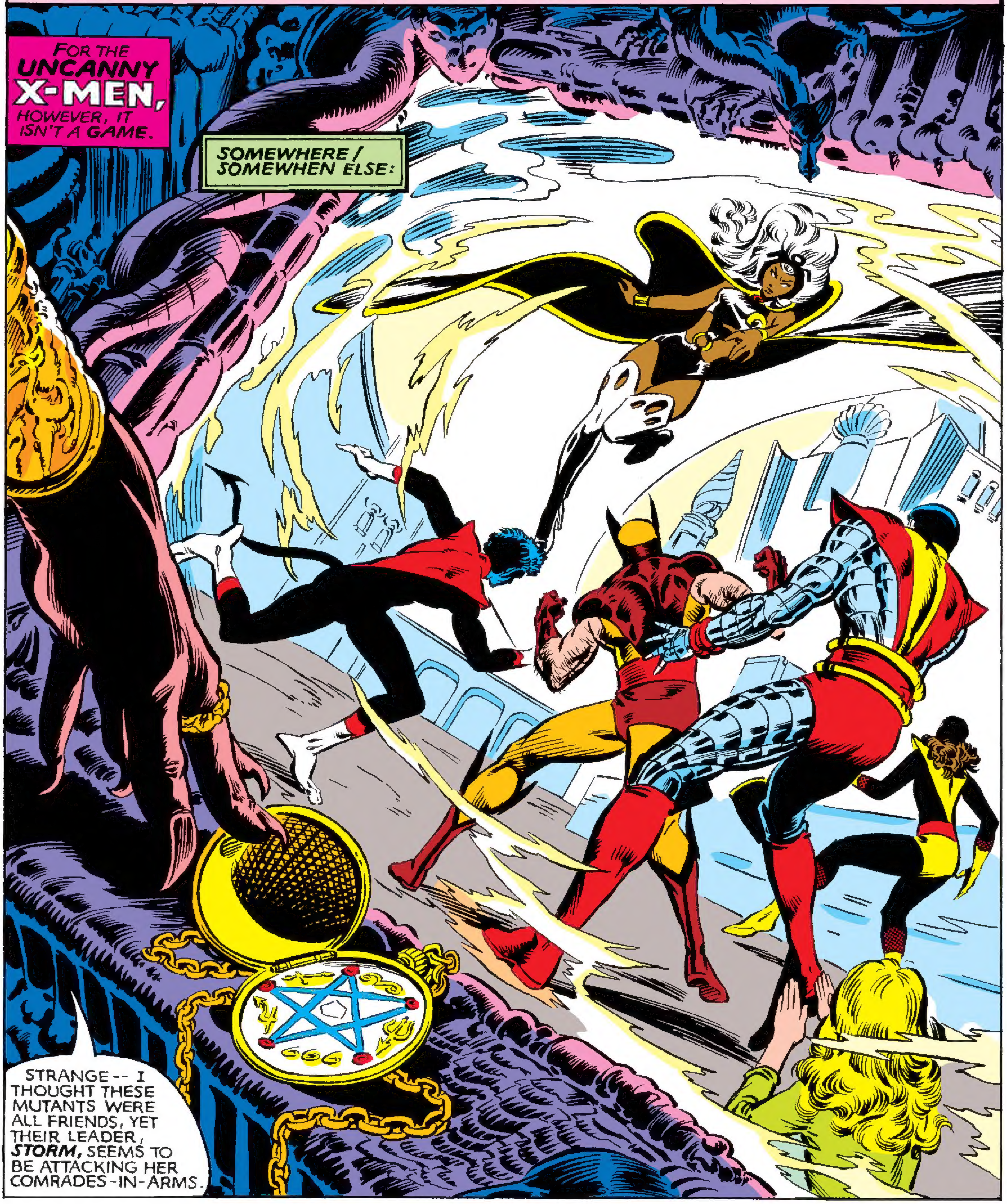
FOR THE **UNCANNY X-MEN,** HOWEVER, IT ISN'T A *GAME.*
SOMEWHERE / SOMEWHEN ELSE:
STRANGE -- I THOUGHT THESE MUTANTS WERE ALL FRIENDS, YET THEIR LEADER, ***STORM,*** SEEMS TO BE ATTACKING HER COMRADES-IN-ARMS.

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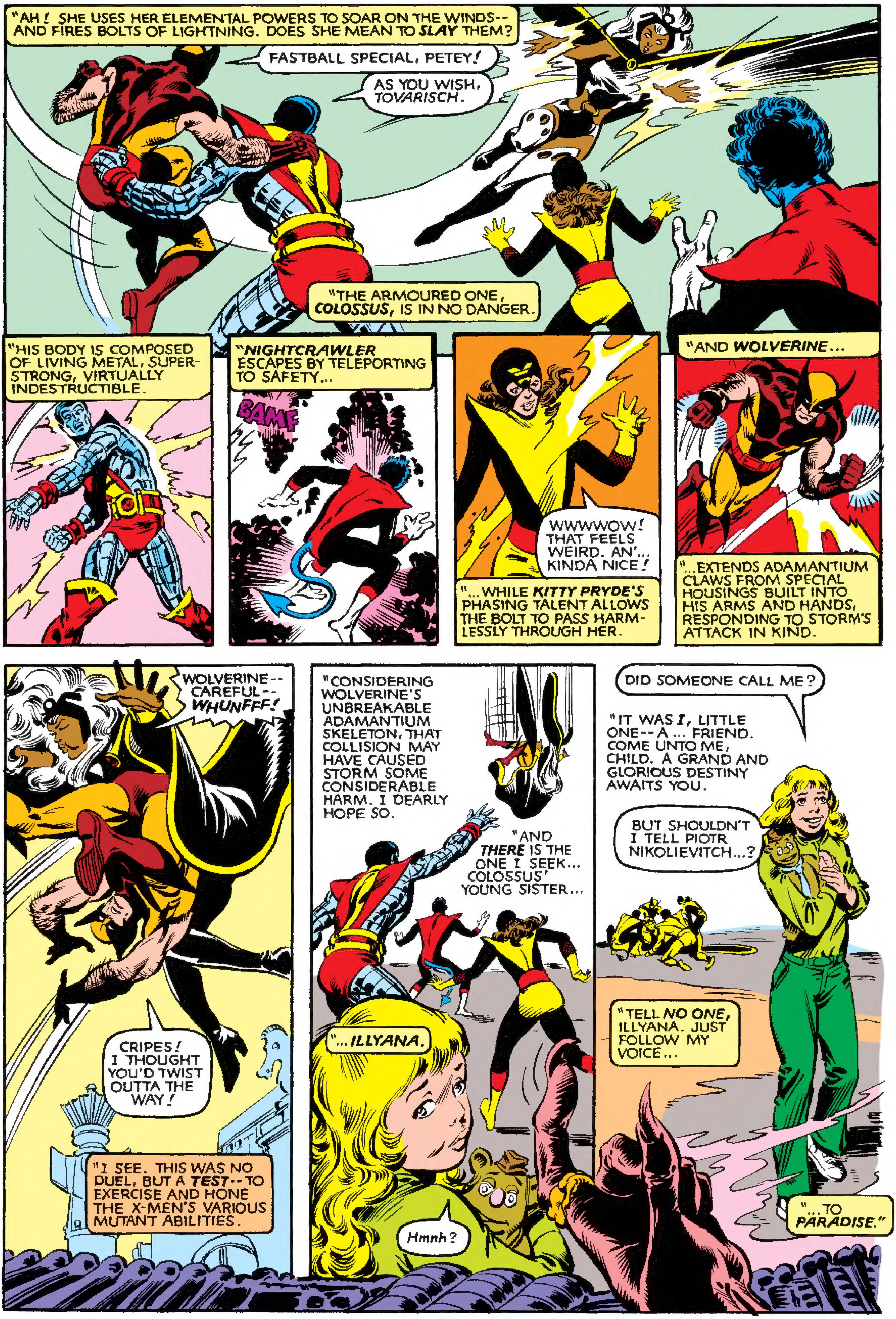
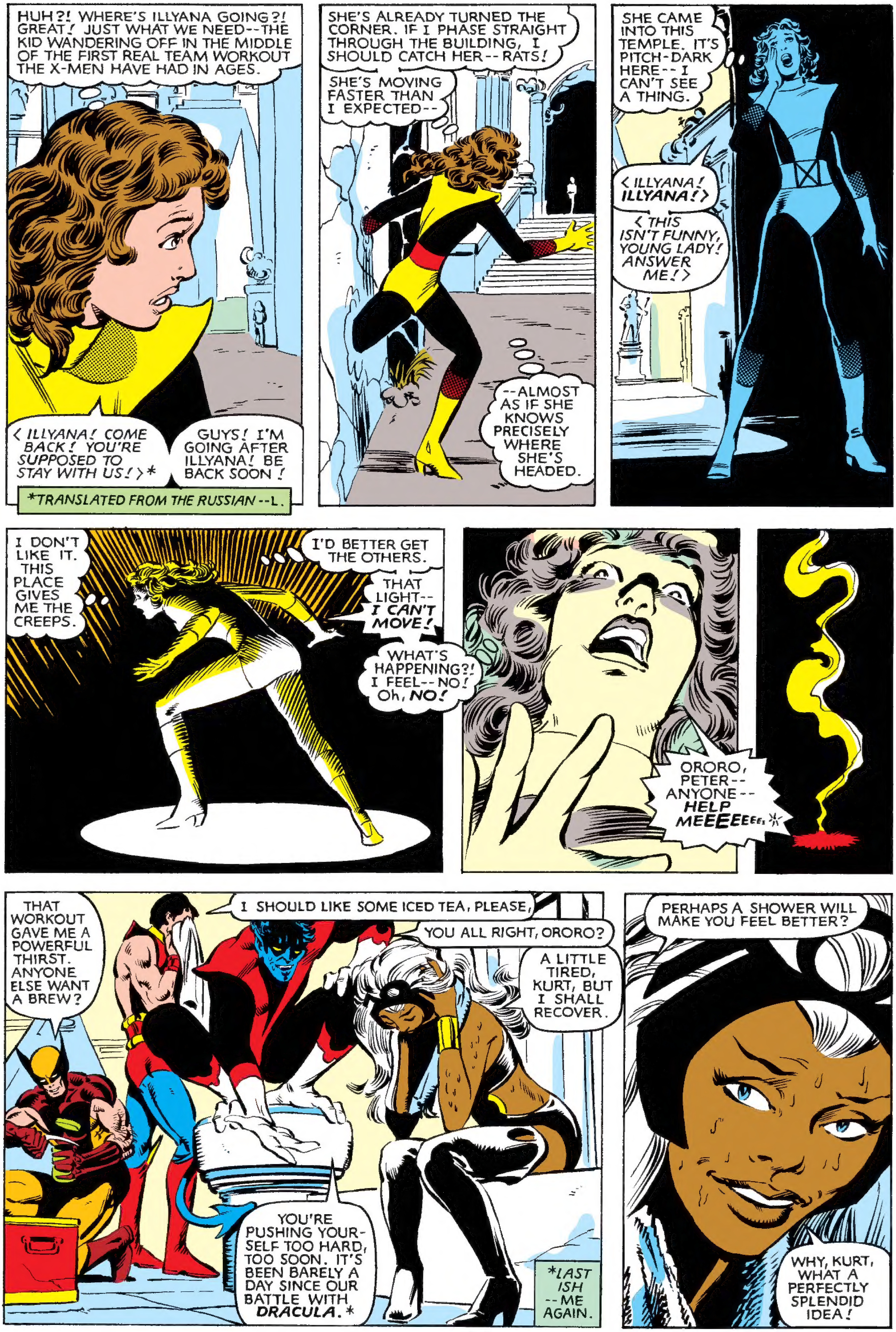
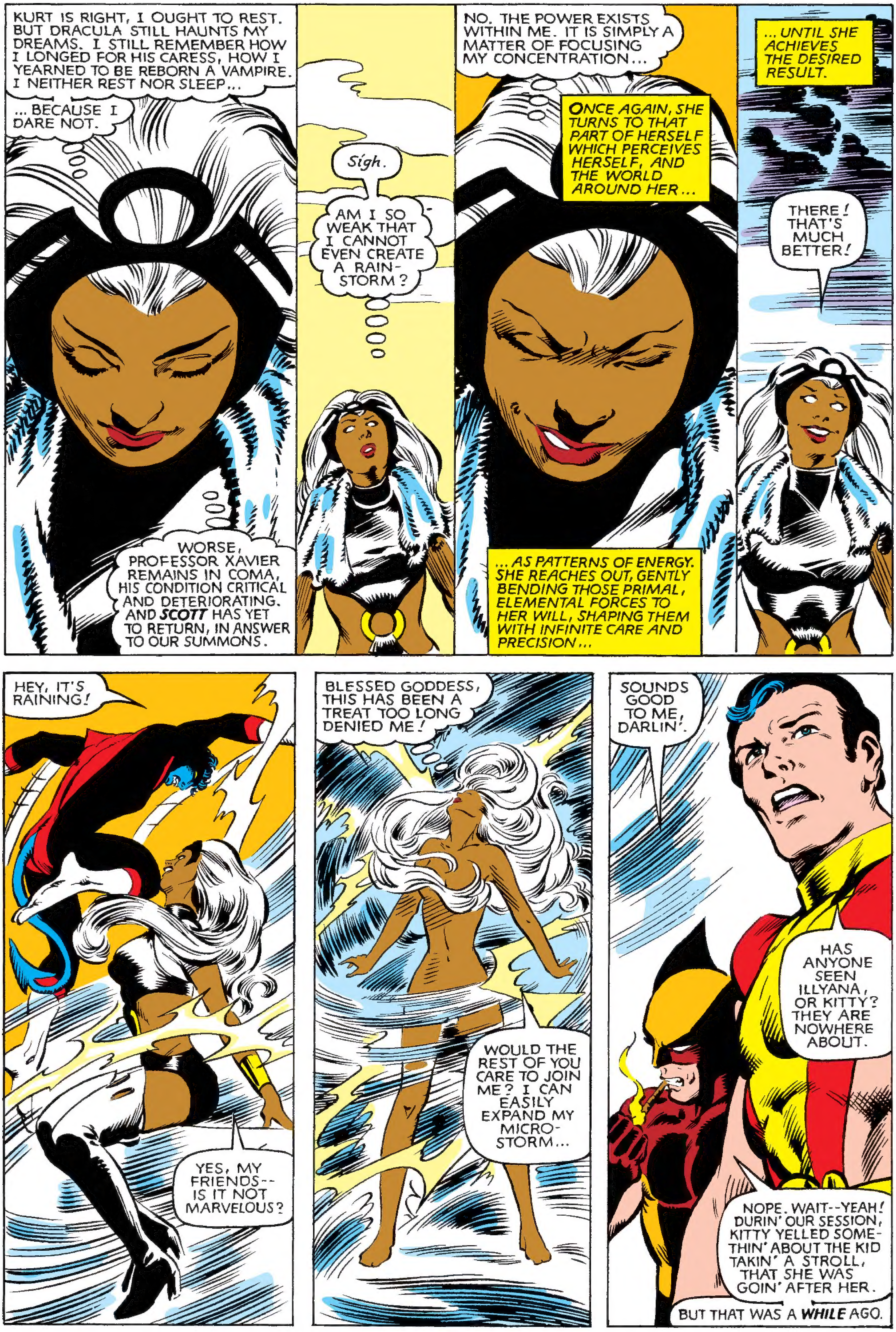
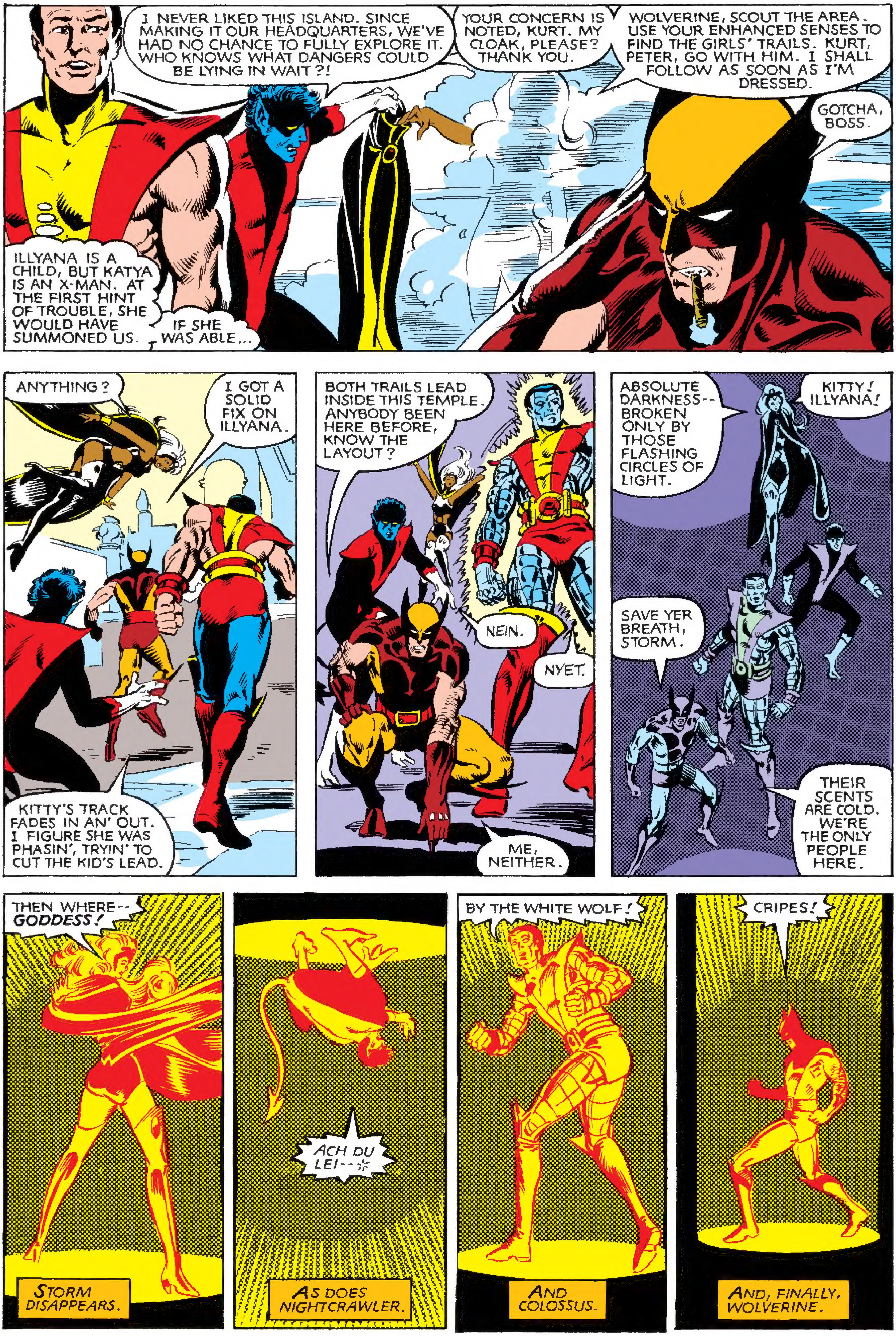
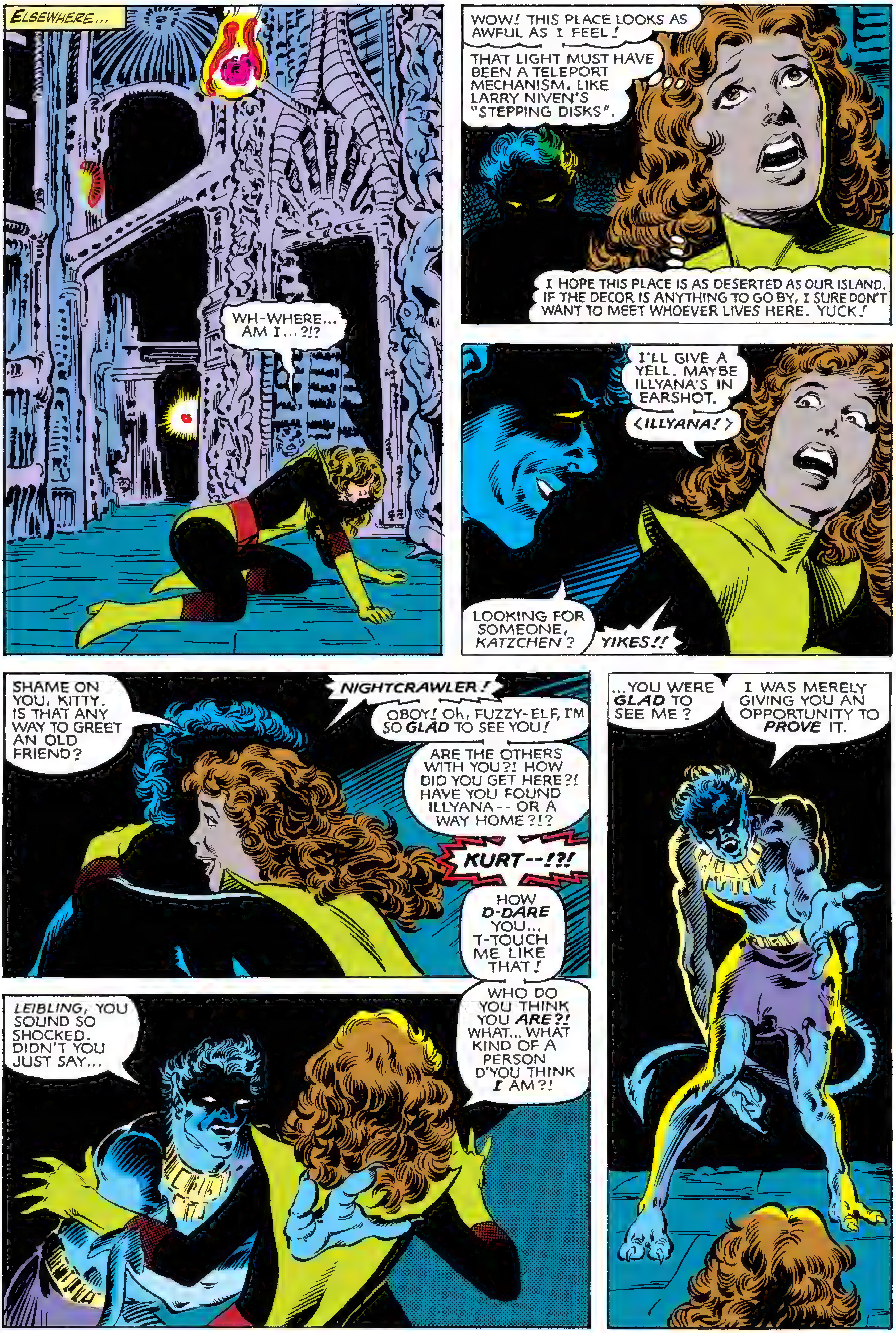
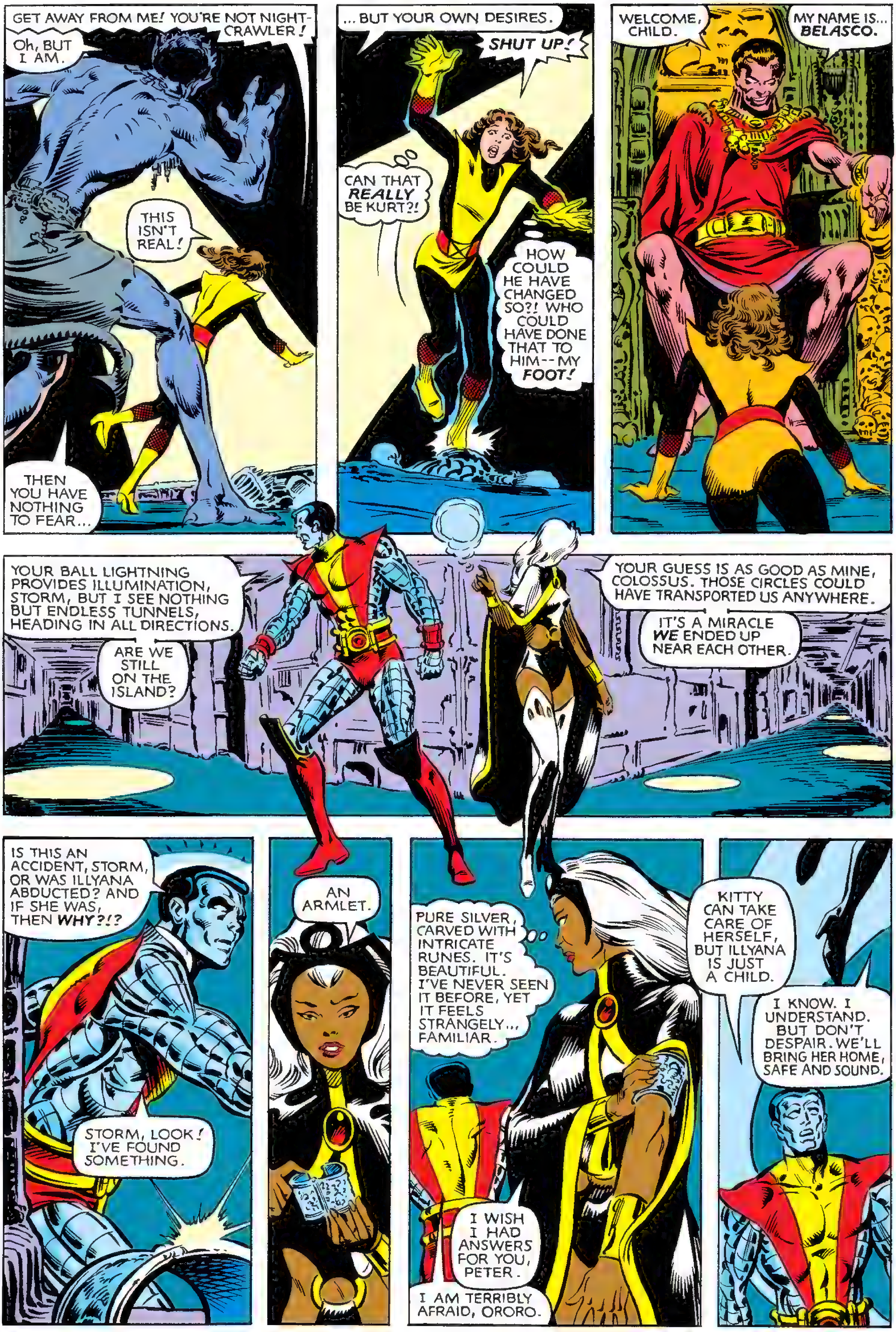

"AH! SHE USES HER ELEMENTAL POWERS TO SOAR ON THE WINDS-- AND FIRES BOLTS OF LIGHTNING. DOES SHE MEAN TO *SLAY* THEM?
FASTBALL SPECIAL, PETEY!
AS YOU WISH, *TOVARISCH*.
"THE ARMOURED ONE, *COLOSSUS,* IS IN NO DANGER.
"HIS BODY IS COMPOSED OF LIVING METAL, SUPER-STRONG, VIRTUALLY INDESTRUCTIBLE.
"*NIGHTCRAWLER* ESCAPES BY TELEPORTING TO SAFETY...
BAMF
WWWWOW! THAT FEELS WEIRD. AN'... KINDA NICE!
"...WHILE *KITTY PRYDE'S* PHASING TALENT ALLOWS THE BOLT TO PASS HARMLESSLY THROUGH HER.
"AND *WOLVERINE*...
"...EXTENDS ADAMANTIUM CLAWS FROM SPECIAL HOUSINGS BUILT INTO HIS ARMS AND HANDS, RESPONDING TO STORM'S ATTACK IN KIND.
WOLVERINE-- CAREFUL-- *WHUNFFF!*
CRIPES! I THOUGHT YOU'D TWIST OUTTA THE WAY!
"I SEE. THIS WAS NO DUEL, BUT A *TEST*--TO EXERCISE AND HONE THE X-MEN'S VARIOUS MUTANT ABILITIES.
"CONSIDERING WOLVERINE'S UNBREAKABLE ADAMANTIUM SKELETON, THAT COLLISION MAY HAVE CAUSED STORM SOME CONSIDERABLE HARM. I DEARLY HOPE SO.
"AND *THERE* IS THE ONE I SEEK... COLOSSUS' YOUNG SISTER...
"...*ILLYANA*.
Hmnh?
DID SOMEONE CALL ME?
"IT WAS *I*, LITTLE ONE-- A ... FRIEND. COME UNTO ME, CHILD. A GRAND AND GLORIOUS DESTINY AWAITS YOU.
BUT SHOULDN'T I TELL PIOTR NIKOLIEVITCH...?
"TELL *NO ONE,* ILLYANA. JUST FOLLOW MY VOICE...
"...TO *PARADISE*."

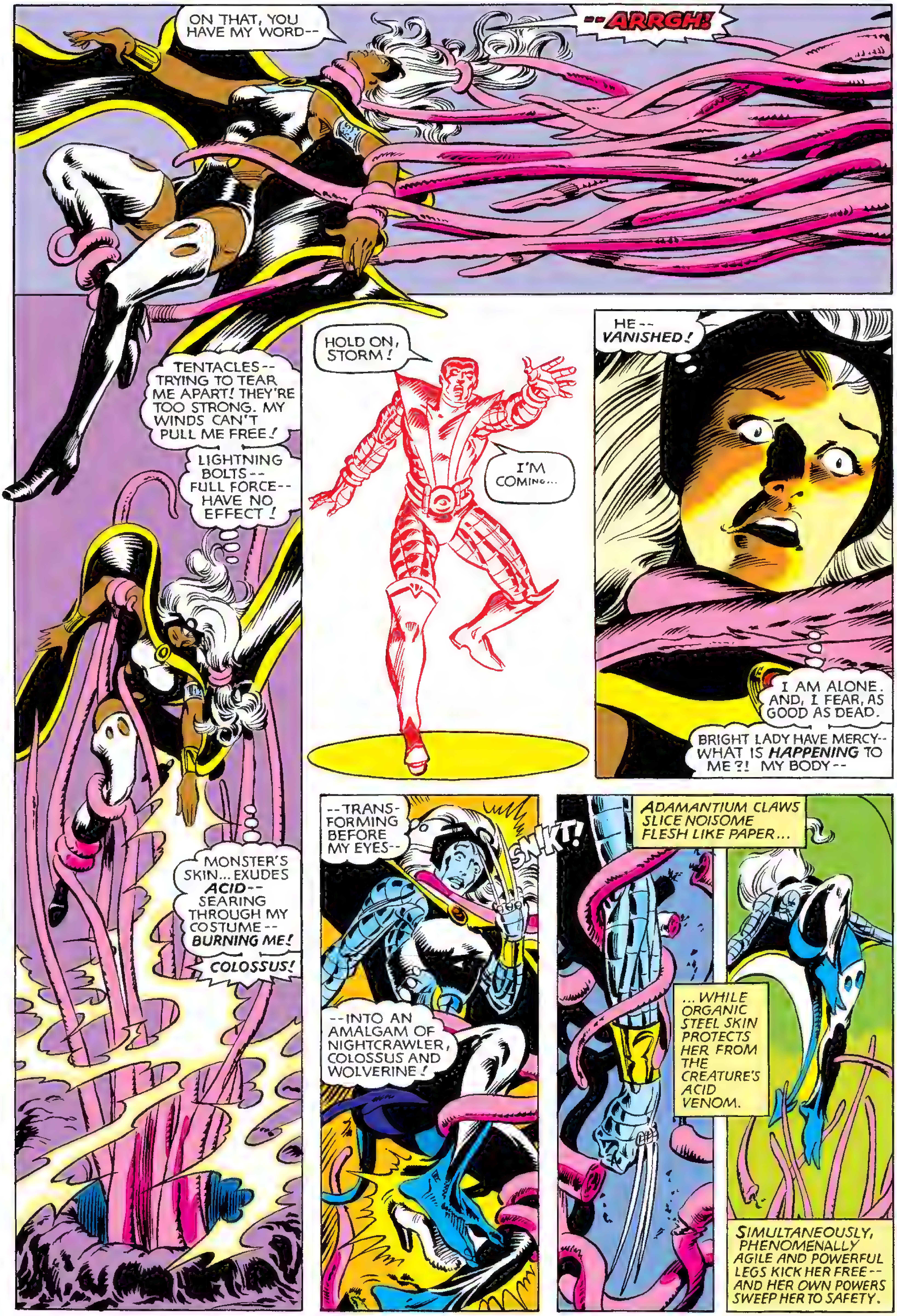

HUH?! WHERE'S ILLYANA GOING?! GREAT! JUST WHAT WE NEED--THE KID WANDERING OFF IN THE MIDDLE OF THE FIRST REAL TEAM WORKOUT THE X-MEN HAVE HAD IN AGES.
< ILLYANA! COME BACK! YOU'RE SUPPOSED TO STAY WITH US! >*
GUYS! I'M GOING AFTER ILLYANA! BE BACK SOON!
*TRANSLATED FROM THE RUSSIAN --L.
SHE'S ALREADY TURNED THE CORNER. IF I PHASE STRAIGHT THROUGH THE BUILDING, I SHOULD CATCH HER-- RATS!
SHE'S MOVING FASTER THAN I EXPECTED--
--ALMOST AS IF SHE KNOWS PRECISELY WHERE SHE'S HEADED.
SHE CAME INTO THIS TEMPLE. IT'S PITCH-DARK HERE-- I CAN'T SEE A THING.
< ILLYANA! ILLYANA! >
< THIS ISN'T FUNNY, YOUNG LADY! ANSWER ME! >
I DON'T LIKE IT. THIS PLACE GIVES ME THE CREEPS.
I'D BETTER GET THE OTHERS.
THAT LIGHT-- I CAN'T MOVE!
WHAT'S HAPPENING?! I FEEL--NO! Oh, NO!
ORORO, PETER-- ANYONE-- HELP MEEEEeee!
THAT WORKOUT GAVE ME A POWERFUL THIRST. ANYONE ELSE WANT A BREW?
I SHOULD LIKE SOME ICED TEA, PLEASE.
YOU ALL RIGHT, ORORO?
A LITTLE TIRED, KURT, BUT I SHALL RECOVER.
YOU'RE PUSHING YOURSELF TOO HARD, TOO SOON. IT'S BEEN BARELY A DAY SINCE OUR BATTLE WITH DRACULA.*
*LAST ISH --ME AGAIN.
PERHAPS A SHOWER WILL MAKE YOU FEEL BETTER?
WHY, KURT, WHAT A PERFECTLY SPLENDID IDEA!

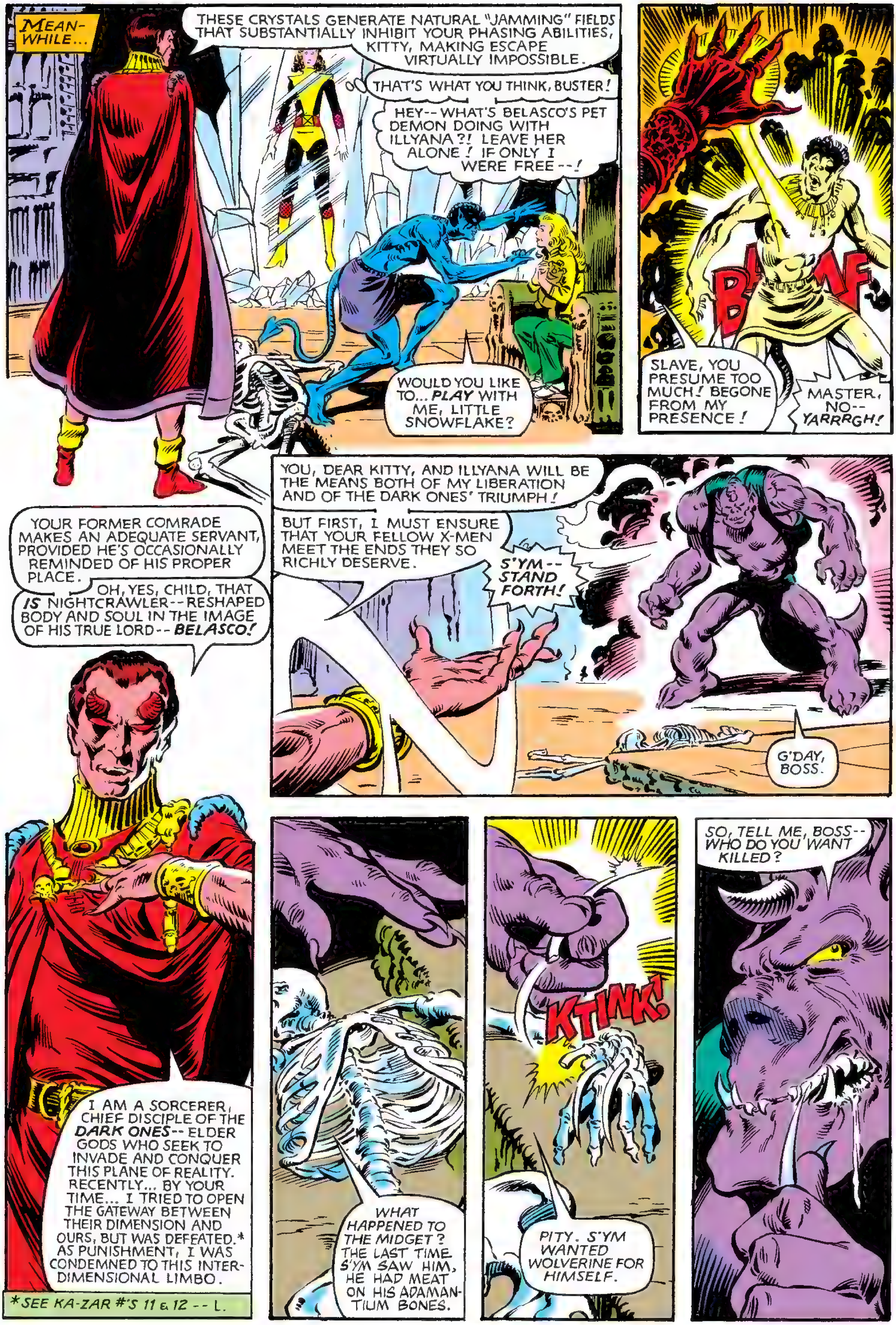

KURT IS RIGHT, I OUGHT TO REST. BUT DRACULA STILL HAUNTS MY DREAMS. I STILL REMEMBER HOW I LONGED FOR HIS CARESS, HOW I YEARNED TO BE REBORN A VAMPIRE. I NEITHER REST NOR SLEEP...
... BECAUSE I DARE NOT.
WORSE, PROFESSOR XAVIER REMAINS IN COMA, HIS CONDITION CRITICAL AND DETERIORATING. AND **SCOTT** HAS YET TO RETURN, IN ANSWER TO OUR SUMMONS.
Sigh.
AM I SO WEAK THAT I CANNOT EVEN CREATE A RAIN-STORM?
NO. THE POWER EXISTS WITHIN ME. IT IS SIMPLY A MATTER OF FOCUSING MY CONCENTRATION...
ONCE AGAIN, SHE TURNS TO THAT PART OF HERSELF WHICH PERCEIVES HERSELF, AND THE WORLD AROUND HER...
...AS PATTERNS OF ENERGY. SHE REACHES OUT, GENTLY BENDING THOSE PRIMAL, ELEMENTAL FORCES TO HER WILL, SHAPING THEM WITH INFINITE CARE AND PRECISION...
...UNTIL SHE ACHIEVES THE DESIRED RESULT.
THERE! THAT'S MUCH BETTER!
HEY, IT'S RAINING!
YES, MY FRIENDS--IS IT NOT MARVELOUS?
BLESSED GODDESS, THIS HAS BEEN A TREAT TOO LONG DENIED ME!
WOULD THE REST OF YOU CARE TO JOIN ME? I CAN EASILY EXPAND MY MICRO-STORM...
SOUNDS GOOD TO ME, DARLIN'.
HAS ANYONE SEEN ILLYANA, OR KITTY? THEY ARE NOWHERE ABOUT.
NOPE. WAIT--YEAH! DURIN' OUR SESSION, KITTY YELLED SOMETHIN' ABOUT THE KID TAKIN' A STROLL, THAT SHE WAS GOIN' AFTER HER.
BUT THAT WAS A **WHILE** AGO.

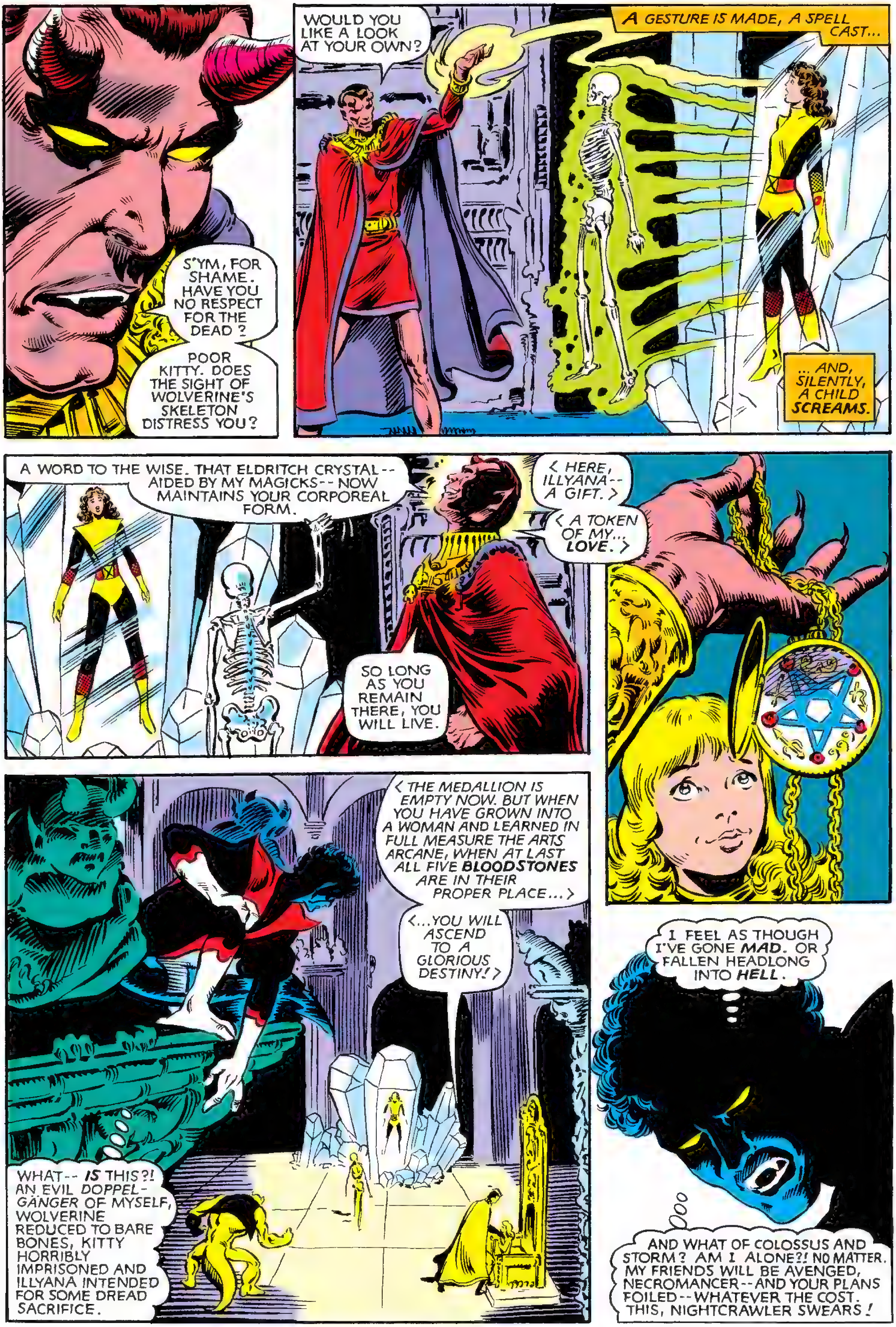

I NEVER LIKED THIS ISLAND. SINCE MAKING IT OUR HEADQUARTERS, WE'VE HAD NO CHANCE TO FULLY EXPLORE IT. WHO KNOWS WHAT DANGERS COULD BE LYING IN WAIT ?!
YOUR CONCERN IS NOTED, KURT. MY CLOAK, PLEASE? THANK YOU.
WOLVERINE, SCOUT THE AREA. USE YOUR ENHANCED SENSES TO FIND THE GIRLS' TRAILS. KURT, PETER, GO WITH HIM. I SHALL FOLLOW AS SOON AS I'M DRESSED.
GOTCHA, BOSS.
ILLYANA IS A CHILD, BUT KATYA IS AN X-MAN. AT THE FIRST HINT OF TROUBLE, SHE WOULD HAVE SUMMONED US.
IF SHE WAS ABLE...
ANYTHING?
I GOT A SOLID FIX ON ILLYANA.
KITTY'S TRACK FADES IN AN' OUT. I FIGURE SHE WAS PHASIN', TRYIN' TO CUT THE KID'S LEAD.
BOTH TRAILS LEAD INSIDE THIS TEMPLE. ANYBODY BEEN HERE BEFORE, KNOW THE LAYOUT?
NEIN.
NYET.
ME, NEITHER.
ABSOLUTE DARKNESS-- BROKEN ONLY BY THOSE FLASHING CIRCLES OF LIGHT.
KITTY! ILLYANA!
SAVE YER BREATH, STORM.
THEIR SCENTS ARE COLD. WE'RE THE ONLY PEOPLE HERE.
THEN WHERE-- GODDESS!
STORM DISAPPEARS.
ACH DU LEI--*
AS DOES NIGHTCRAWLER.
BY THE WHITE WOLF!
AND COLOSSUS.
CRIPES!
AND, FINALLY, WOLVERINE.

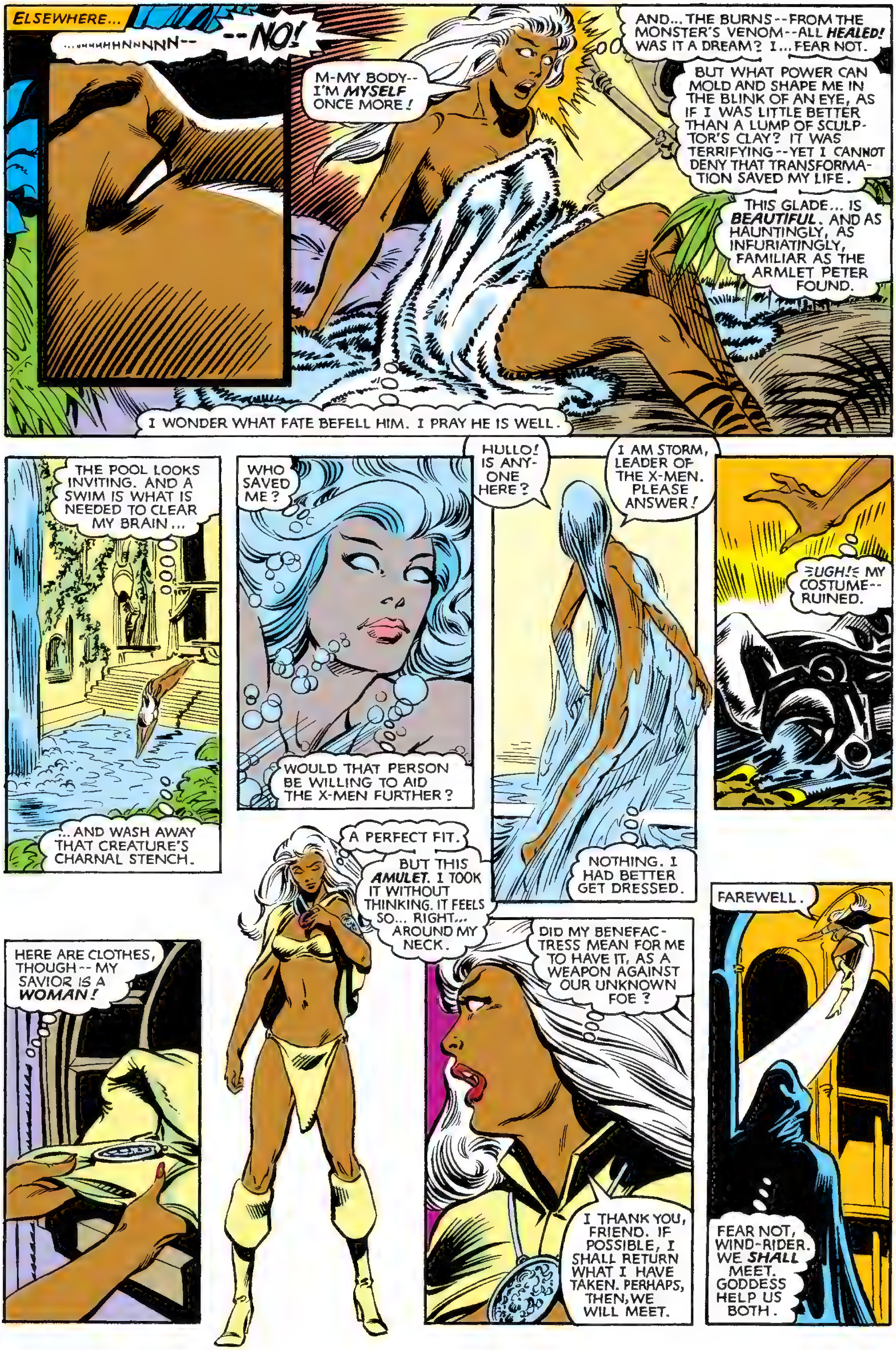

ELSEWHERE...
WH-WHERE... AM I...?!?
WOW! THIS PLACE LOOKS AS AWFUL AS I FEEL!
THAT LIGHT MUST HAVE BEEN A TELEPORT MECHANISM, LIKE LARRY NIVEN'S "STEPPING DISKS".
I HOPE THIS PLACE IS AS DESERTED AS OUR ISLAND. IF THE DECOR IS ANYTHING TO GO BY, I SURE DON'T WANT TO MEET WHOEVER LIVES HERE. YUCK!
I'LL GIVE A YELL. MAYBE ILLYANA'S IN EARSHOT.
<ILLYANA!>
LOOKING FOR SOMEONE, KATZCHEN?
YIKES!!
SHAME ON YOU, KITTY. IS THAT ANY WAY TO GREET AN OLD FRIEND?
NIGHTCRAWLER!
OBOY! Oh, FUZZY-ELF, I'M SO GLAD TO SEE YOU!
ARE THE OTHERS WITH YOU?! HOW DID YOU GET HERE?! HAVE YOU FOUND ILLYANA -- OR A WAY HOME?!?
KURT--!?!
HOW D-DARE YOU... T-TOUCH ME LIKE THAT!
LEIBLING, YOU SOUND SO SHOCKED. DIDN'T YOU JUST SAY...
WHO DO YOU THINK YOU ARE?! WHAT... WHAT KIND OF A PERSON D'YOU THINK I AM?!
...YOU WERE GLAD TO SEE ME?
I WAS MERELY GIVING YOU AN OPPORTUNITY TO PROVE IT.

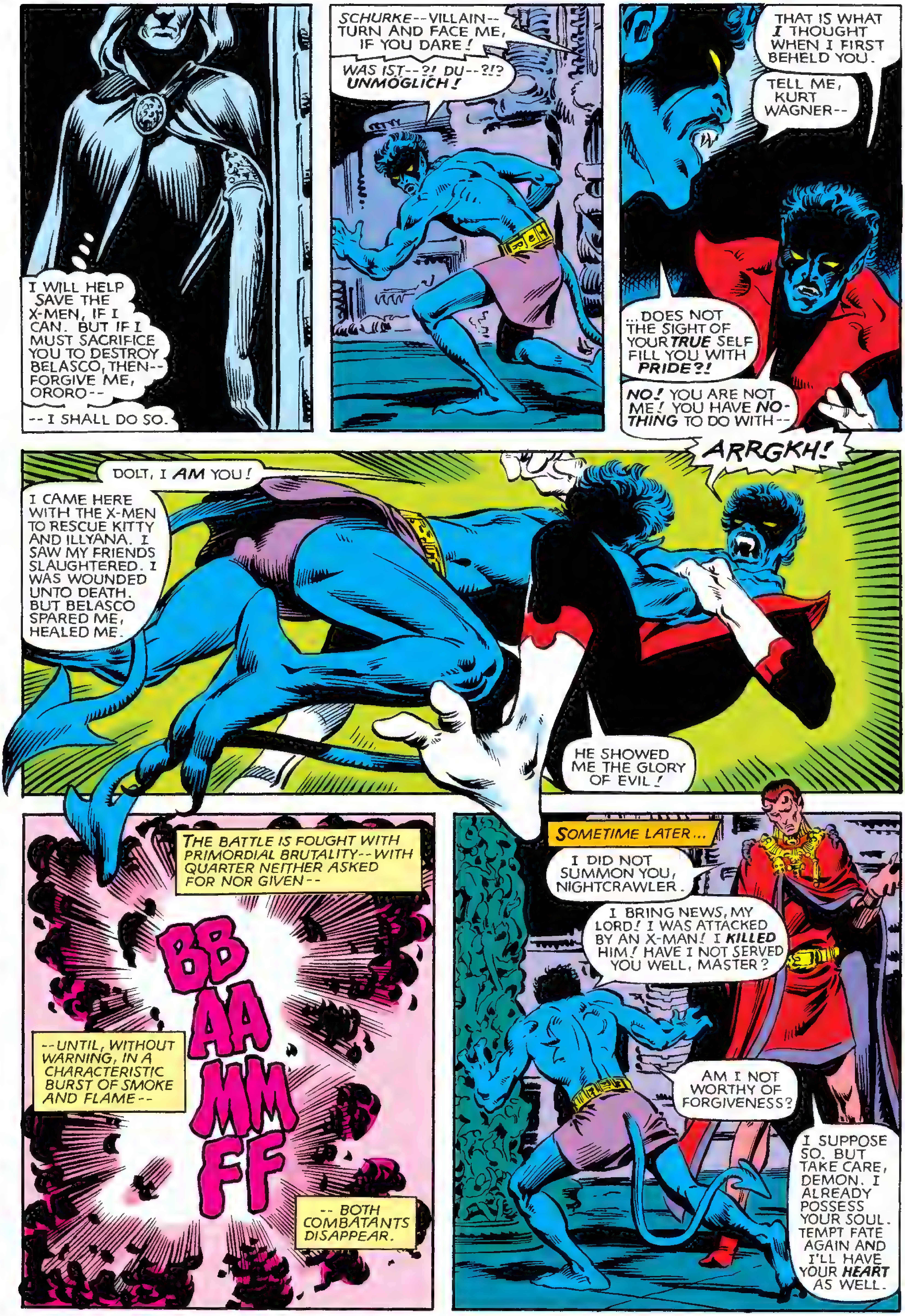

GET AWAY FROM ME! YOU'RE NOT NIGHTCRAWLER!
Oh, BUT I AM.
THIS ISN'T REAL!
THEN YOU HAVE NOTHING TO FEAR...
... BUT YOUR OWN DESIRES.
SHUT UP!
CAN THAT ***REALLY*** BE KURT?!
HOW COULD HE HAVE CHANGED SO?! WHO COULD HAVE DONE THAT TO HIM--MY ***FOOT!***
WELCOME, CHILD.
MY NAME IS... **BELASCO.**
YOUR BALL LIGHTNING PROVIDES ILLUMINATION, STORM, BUT I SEE NOTHING BUT ENDLESS TUNNELS, HEADING IN ALL DIRECTIONS.
ARE WE STILL ON THE ISLAND?
YOUR GUESS IS AS GOOD AS MINE, COLOSSUS. THOSE CIRCLES COULD HAVE TRANSPORTED US ANYWHERE.
IT'S A MIRACLE ***WE*** ENDED UP NEAR EACH OTHER.
IS THIS AN ACCIDENT, STORM, OR WAS ILLYANA ABDUCTED? AND IF SHE WAS, THEN ***WHY?!?***
STORM, LOOK! I'VE FOUND SOMETHING.
AN ARMLET.
PURE SILVER, CARVED WITH INTRICATE RUNES. IT'S BEAUTIFUL. I'VE NEVER SEEN IT BEFORE, YET IT FEELS STRANGELY... FAMILIAR.
I WISH I HAD ANSWERS FOR YOU, PETER.
I AM TERRIBLY AFRAID, ORORO.
KITTY CAN TAKE CARE OF HERSELF, BUT ILLYANA IS JUST A CHILD.
I KNOW. I UNDERSTAND. BUT DON'T DESPAIR. WE'LL BRING HER HOME, SAFE AND SOUND.

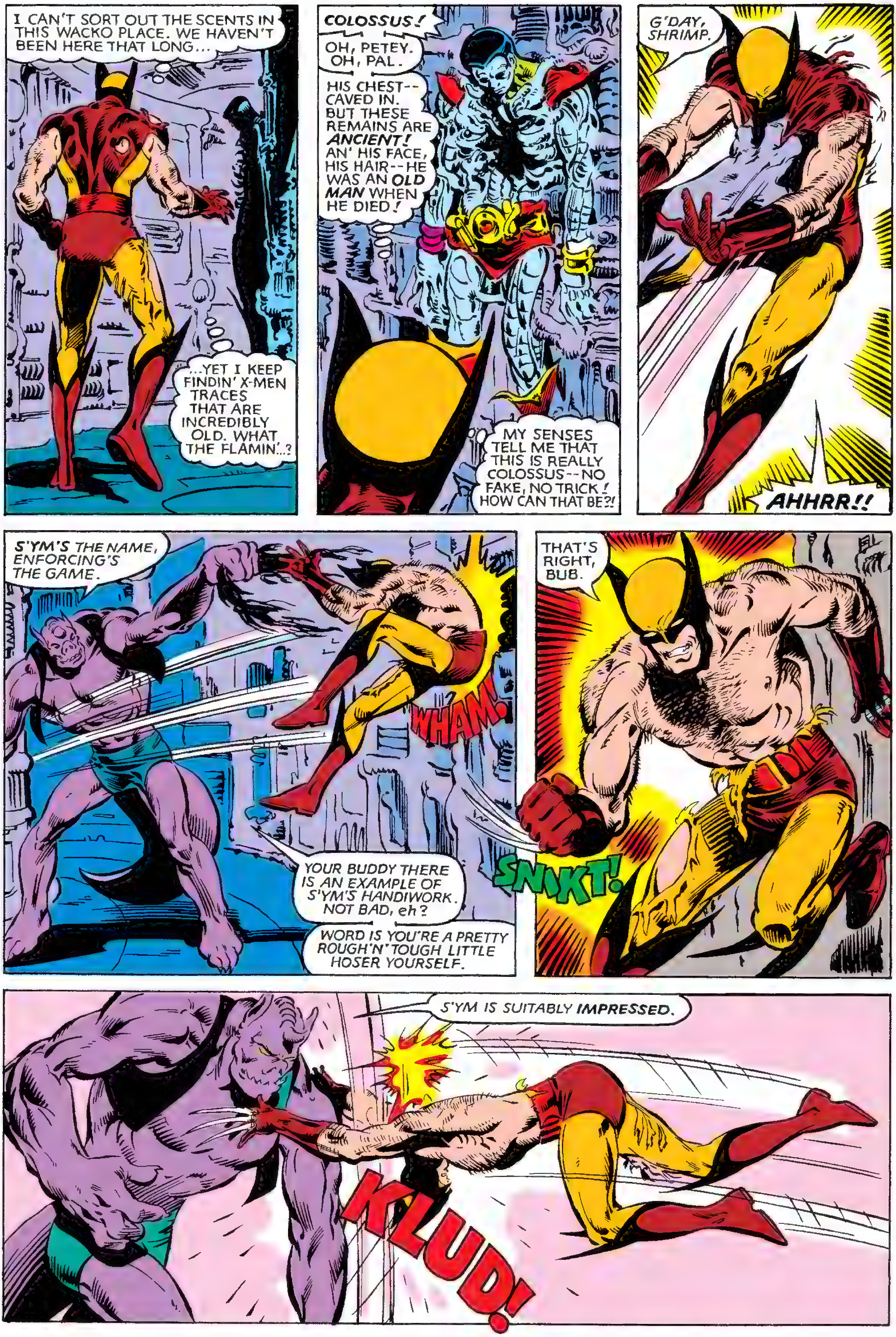

ON THAT, YOU HAVE MY WORD--
--ARRGH!
TENTACLES--TRYING TO TEAR ME APART! THEY'RE TOO STRONG. MY WINDS CAN'T PULL ME FREE!
LIGHTNING BOLTS--FULL FORCE--HAVE NO EFFECT!
MONSTER'S SKIN...EXUDES **ACID**--SEARING THROUGH MY COSTUME--**BURNING ME!**
COLOSSUS!
HOLD ON, STORM!
I'M COMING...
HE--***VANISHED!***
I AM ALONE. AND, I FEAR, AS GOOD AS DEAD.
BRIGHT LADY HAVE MERCY--WHAT IS ***HAPPENING*** TO ME?! MY BODY--
--TRANSFORMING BEFORE MY EYES--
SNIKT!
--INTO AN AMALGAM OF NIGHTCRAWLER, COLOSSUS AND WOLVERINE!
ADAMANTIUM CLAWS SLICE NOISOME FLESH LIKE PAPER...
...WHILE ORGANIC STEEL SKIN PROTECTS HER FROM THE CREATURE'S ACID VENOM.
SIMULTANEOUSLY, PHENOMENALLY AGILE AND POWERFUL LEGS KICK HER FREE--AND HER OWN POWERS SWEEP HER TO SAFETY.

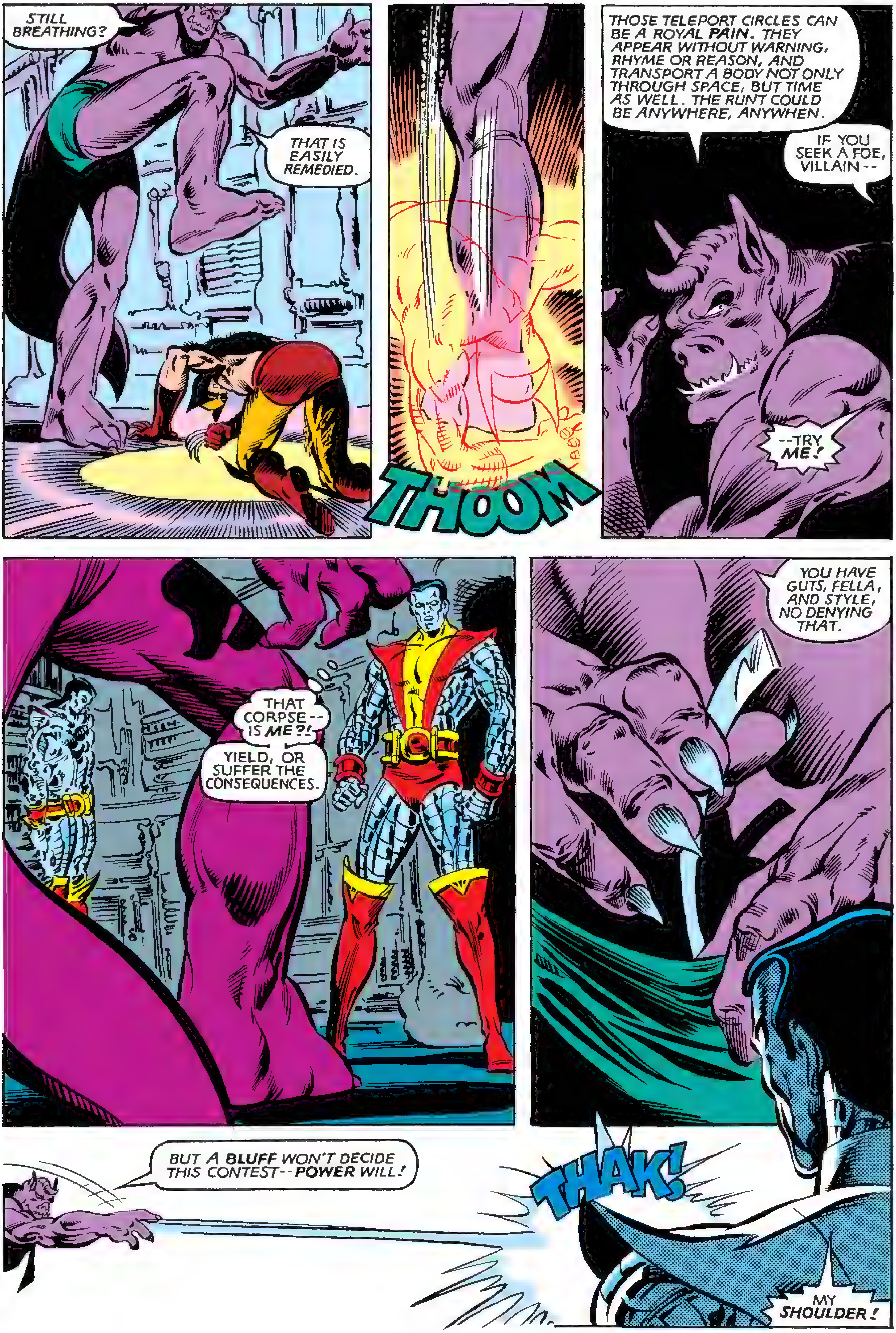

MEAN-WHILE...
THESE CRYSTALS GENERATE NATURAL "JAMMING" FIELDS THAT SUBSTANTIALLY INHIBIT YOUR PHASING ABILITIES, KITTY, MAKING ESCAPE VIRTUALLY IMPOSSIBLE.
THAT'S WHAT YOU THINK, BUSTER!
HEY-- WHAT'S BELASCO'S PET DEMON DOING WITH ILLYANA?! LEAVE HER ALONE! IF ONLY I WERE FREE--!
WOULD YOU LIKE TO... PLAY WITH ME, LITTLE SNOWFLAKE?
BAMF
SLAVE, YOU PRESUME TOO MUCH! BEGONE FROM MY PRESENCE!
MASTER, NO-- YARRRGH!
YOUR FORMER COMRADE MAKES AN ADEQUATE SERVANT, PROVIDED HE'S OCCASIONALLY REMINDED OF HIS PROPER PLACE.
OH, YES, CHILD, THAT IS NIGHTCRAWLER-- RESHAPED BODY AND SOUL IN THE IMAGE OF HIS TRUE LORD-- BELASCO!
YOU, DEAR KITTY, AND ILLYANA WILL BE THE MEANS BOTH OF MY LIBERATION AND OF THE DARK ONES' TRIUMPH!
BUT FIRST, I MUST ENSURE THAT YOUR FELLOW X-MEN MEET THE ENDS THEY SO RICHLY DESERVE.
S'YM-- STAND FORTH!
G'DAY, BOSS.
I AM A SORCERER, CHIEF DISCIPLE OF THE DARK ONES-- ELDER GODS WHO SEEK TO INVADE AND CONQUER THIS PLANE OF REALITY. RECENTLY... BY YOUR TIME... I TRIED TO OPEN THE GATEWAY BETWEEN THEIR DIMENSION AND OURS, BUT WAS DEFEATED.* AS PUNISHMENT, I WAS CONDEMNED TO THIS INTER-DIMENSIONAL LIMBO.
*SEE KA-ZAR #'S 11 & 12 -- L.
WHAT HAPPENED TO THE MIDGET? THE LAST TIME S'YM SAW HIM, HE HAD MEAT ON HIS ADAMANTIUM BONES.
KTINK!
PITY. S'YM WANTED WOLVERINE FOR HIMSELF.
SO, TELL ME, BOSS-- WHO DO YOU WANT KILLED?

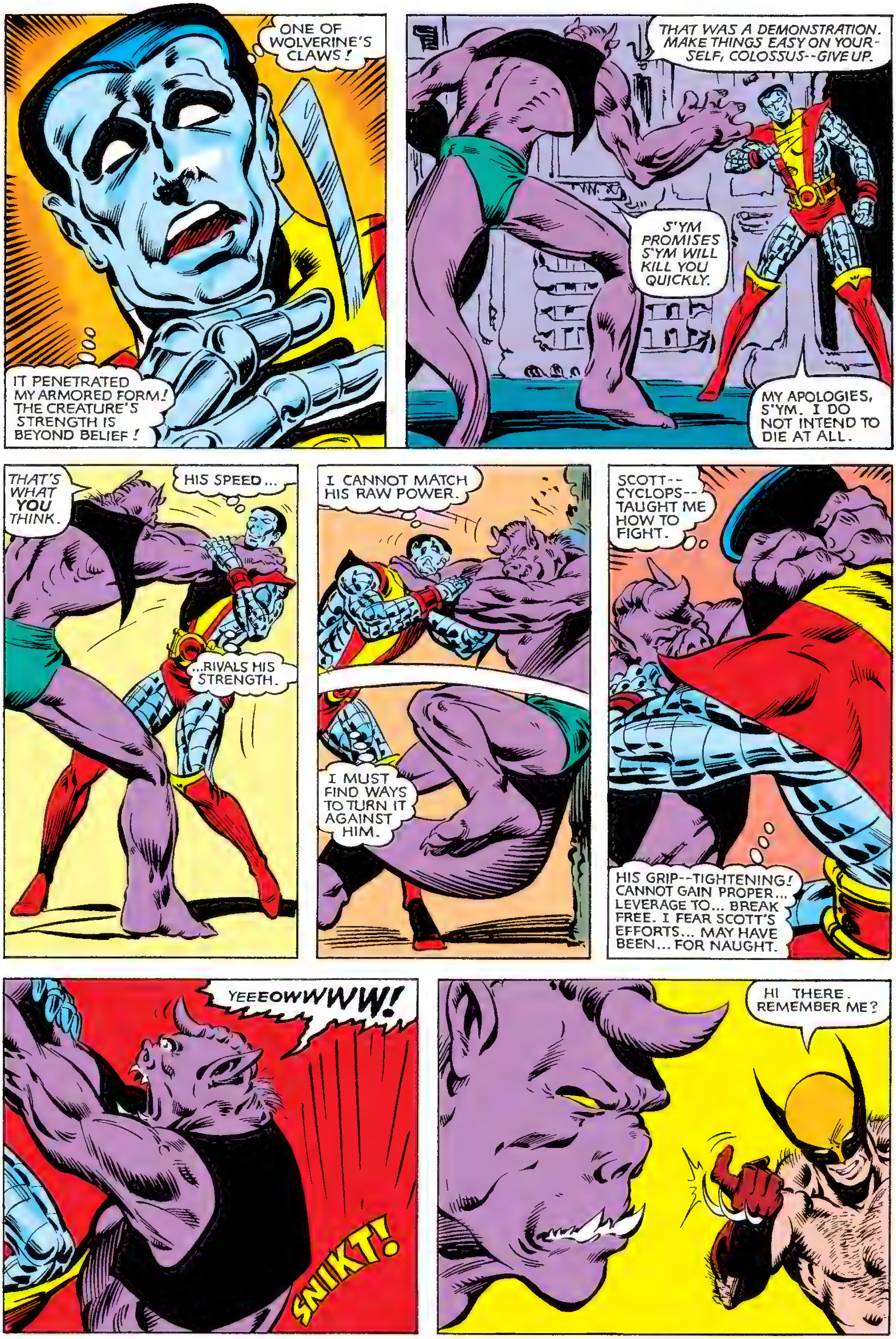

S'YM, FOR SHAME. HAVE YOU NO RESPECT FOR THE DEAD?
POOR KITTY. DOES THE SIGHT OF WOLVERINE'S SKELETON DISTRESS YOU?
WOULD YOU LIKE A LOOK AT YOUR OWN?
A GESTURE IS MADE, A SPELL CAST...
... AND, SILENTLY, A CHILD **SCREAMS**.
A WORD TO THE WISE. THAT ELDRITCH CRYSTAL -- AIDED BY MY MAGICKS -- NOW MAINTAINS YOUR CORPOREAL FORM.
SO LONG AS YOU REMAIN THERE, YOU WILL LIVE.
< *HERE, ILLYANA -- A GIFT.* >
< *A TOKEN OF MY... **LOVE**.* >
< *THE MEDALLION IS EMPTY NOW. BUT WHEN YOU HAVE GROWN INTO A WOMAN AND LEARNED IN FULL MEASURE THE ARTS ARCANE, WHEN AT LAST ALL FIVE **BLOODSTONES** ARE IN THEIR PROPER PLACE...* >
< *...YOU WILL ASCEND TO A GLORIOUS DESTINY!* >
WHAT -- ***IS*** THIS?! AN EVIL *DOPPELGÄNGER* OF MYSELF, WOLVERINE REDUCED TO BARE BONES, KITTY HORRIBLY IMPRISONED AND ILLYANA INTENDED FOR SOME DREAD SACRIFICE.
I FEEL AS THOUGH I'VE GONE ***MAD***. OR FALLEN HEADLONG INTO ***HELL***.
AND WHAT OF COLOSSUS AND STORM? AM I ALONE?! NO MATTER. MY FRIENDS WILL BE AVENGED, NECROMANCER -- AND YOUR PLANS FOILED -- WHATEVER THE COST. THIS, NIGHTCRAWLER SWEARS!

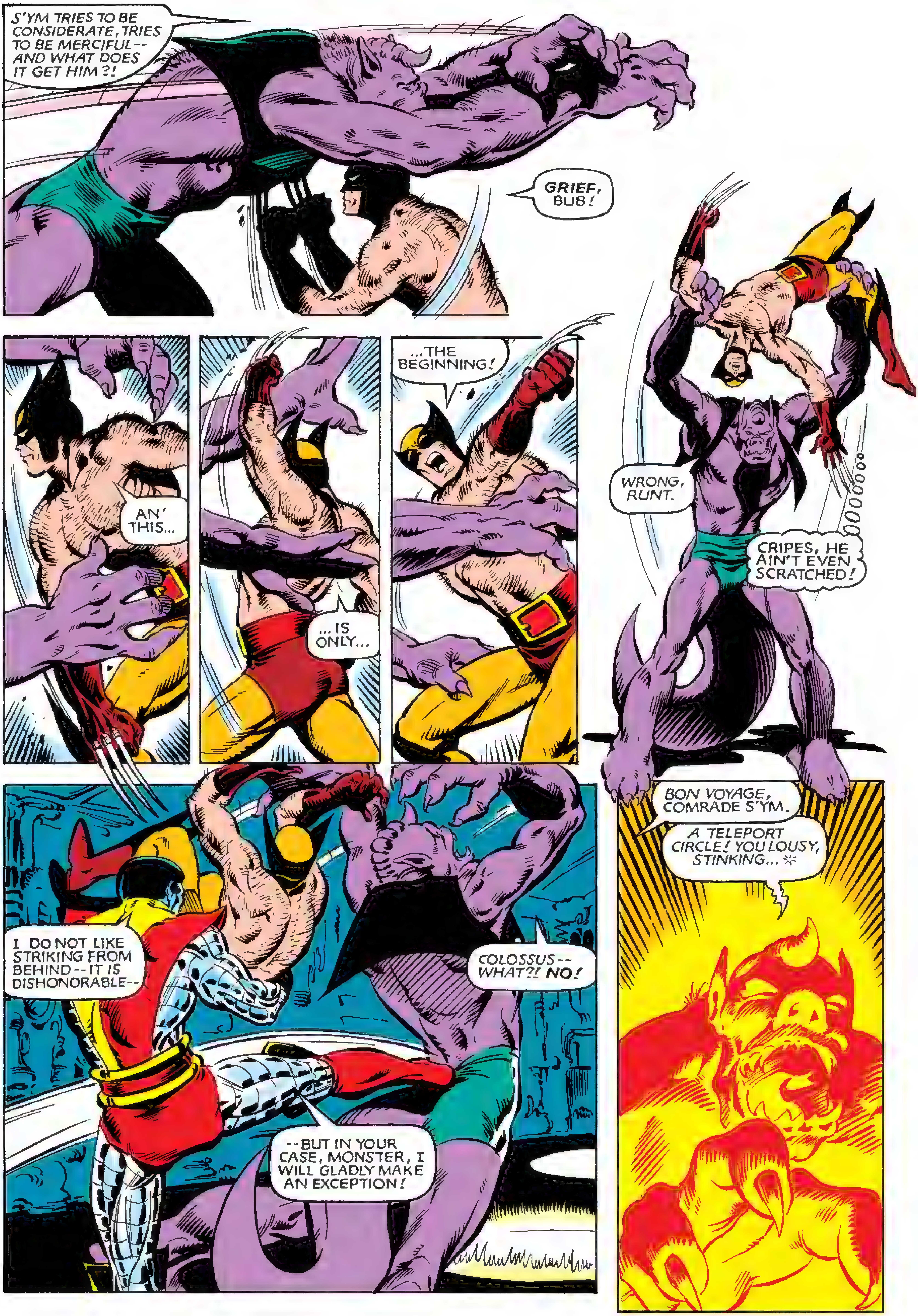

ELSEWHERE...
...HHHHHNNNNN-- --NO!
M-MY BODY-- I'M *MYSELF* ONCE MORE!
AND... THE BURNS--FROM THE MONSTER'S VENOM--ALL *HEALED!* WAS IT A DREAM? I... FEAR NOT.
BUT WHAT POWER CAN MOLD AND SHAPE ME IN THE BLINK OF AN EYE, AS IF I WAS LITTLE BETTER THAN A LUMP OF SCULPTOR'S CLAY? IT WAS TERRIFYING--YET I CANNOT DENY THAT TRANSFORMATION SAVED MY LIFE.
THIS GLADE... IS ***BEAUTIFUL***. AND AS HAUNTINGLY, AS INFURIATINGLY, FAMILIAR AS THE ARMLET PETER FOUND.
I WONDER WHAT FATE BEFELL HIM. I PRAY HE IS WELL.
THE POOL LOOKS INVITING. AND A SWIM IS WHAT IS NEEDED TO CLEAR MY BRAIN...
...AND WASH AWAY THAT CREATURE'S CHARNAL STENCH.
WHO SAVED ME?
WOULD THAT PERSON BE WILLING TO AID THE X-MEN FURTHER?
HULLO! IS ANYONE HERE?
I AM STORM, LEADER OF THE X-MEN. PLEASE ANSWER!
NOTHING. I HAD BETTER GET DRESSED.
UGH! MY COSTUME--RUINED.
HERE ARE CLOTHES, THOUGH--MY SAVIOR IS A ***WOMAN!***
A PERFECT FIT.
BUT THIS ***AMULET***. I TOOK IT WITHOUT THINKING. IT FEELS SO... RIGHT... AROUND MY NECK.
DID MY BENEFACTRESS MEAN FOR ME TO HAVE IT, AS A WEAPON AGAINST OUR UNKNOWN FOE?
I THANK YOU, FRIEND. IF POSSIBLE, I SHALL RETURN WHAT I HAVE TAKEN. PERHAPS, THEN, WE WILL MEET.
FAREWELL.
FEAR NOT, WIND-RIDER. WE ***SHALL*** MEET. GODDESS HELP US BOTH.

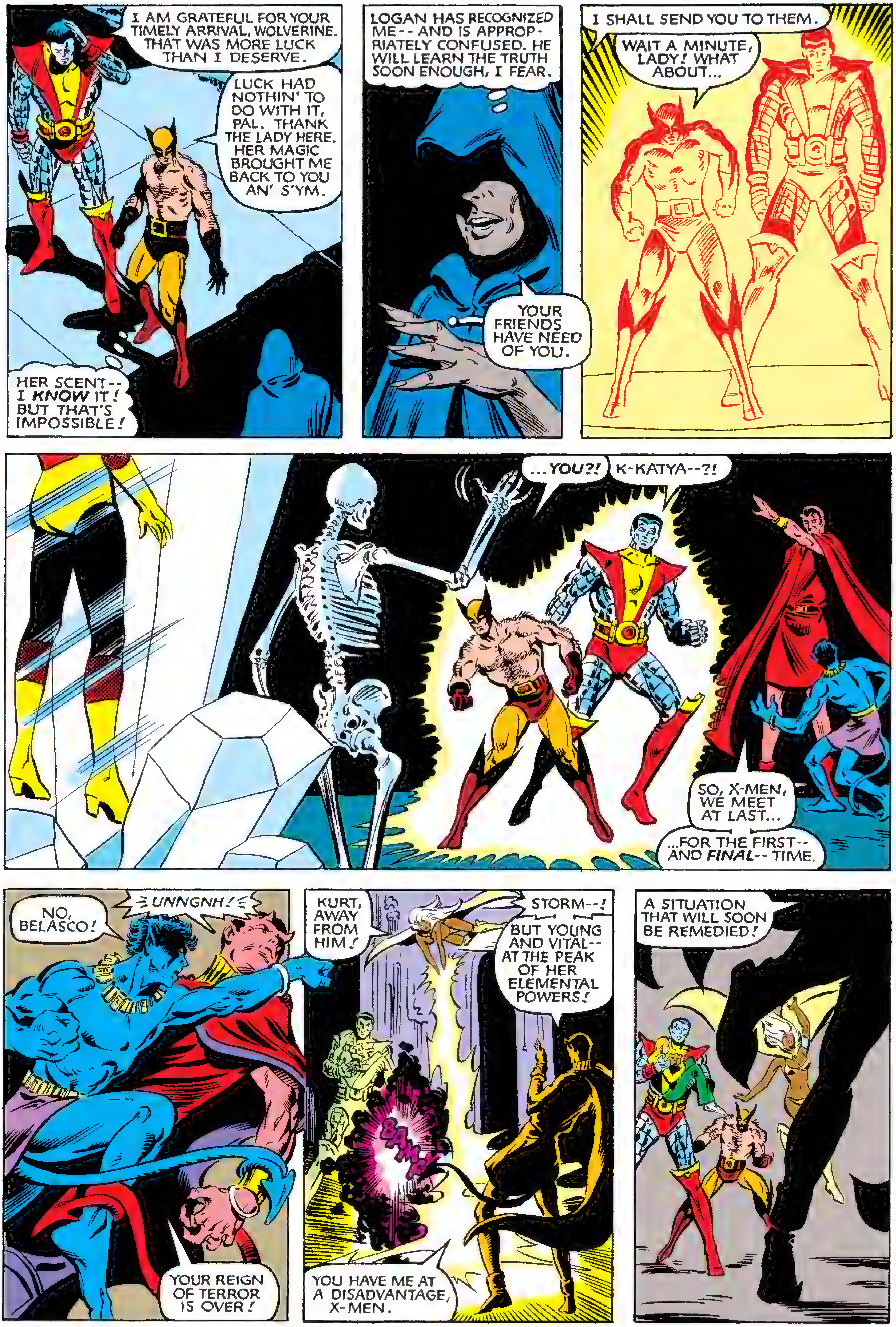

I WILL HELP SAVE THE X-MEN, IF I CAN. BUT IF I MUST SACRIFICE YOU TO DESTROY BELASCO, THEN-- FORGIVE ME, ORORO--
-- I SHALL DO SO.
SCHURKE--VILLAIN--TURN AND FACE ME, IF YOU DARE!
*WAS IST--?! DU--?!? **UNMÖGLICH!***
THAT IS WHAT *I* THOUGHT WHEN I FIRST BEHELD YOU.
TELL ME, KURT WAGNER--
...DOES NOT THE SIGHT OF YOUR ***TRUE*** SELF FILL YOU WITH ***PRIDE?!***
NO! YOU ARE NOT ME! YOU HAVE ***NOTHING*** TO DO WITH--
ARRGKH!
DOLT, I ***AM*** YOU!
I CAME HERE WITH THE X-MEN TO RESCUE KITTY AND ILLYANA. I SAW MY FRIENDS SLAUGHTERED. I WAS WOUNDED UNTO DEATH. BUT BELASCO SPARED ME, HEALED ME.
HE SHOWED ME THE GLORY OF EVIL!
THE BATTLE IS FOUGHT WITH PRIMORDIAL BRUTALITY--WITH QUARTER NEITHER ASKED FOR NOR GIVEN--
BBAAMMFF
--UNTIL, WITHOUT WARNING, IN A CHARACTERISTIC BURST OF SMOKE AND FLAME--
-- BOTH COMBATANTS DISAPPEAR.
SOMETIME LATER...
I DID NOT SUMMON YOU, NIGHTCRAWLER.
I BRING NEWS, MY LORD! I WAS ATTACKED BY AN X-MAN! I ***KILLED*** HIM! HAVE I NOT SERVED YOU WELL, MASTER?
AM I NOT WORTHY OF FORGIVENESS?
I SUPPOSE SO. BUT TAKE CARE, DEMON. I ALREADY POSSESS YOUR SOUL. TEMPT FATE AGAIN AND I'LL HAVE YOUR ***HEART*** AS WELL.

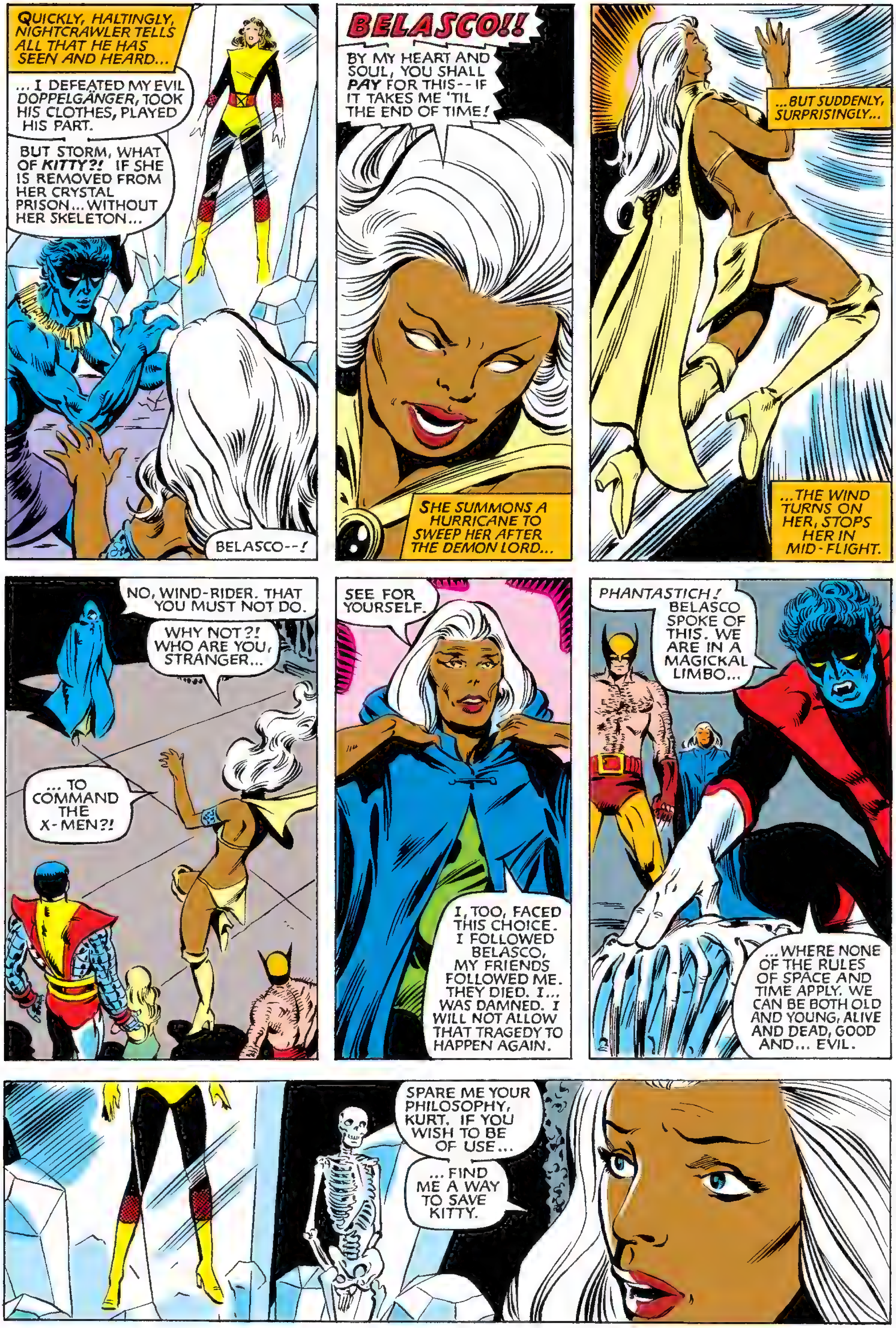

I CAN'T SORT OUT THE SCENTS IN THIS WACKO PLACE. WE HAVEN'T BEEN HERE THAT LONG...
...YET I KEEP FINDIN' X-MEN TRACES THAT ARE INCREDIBLY OLD. WHAT THE FLAMIN'...?
COLOSSUS!
OH, PETEY. OH, PAL.
HIS CHEST-- CAVED IN. BUT THESE REMAINS ARE ***ANCIENT!*** AN' HIS FACE, HIS HAIR--HE WAS AN **OLD *MAN*** WHEN HE DIED!
MY SENSES TELL ME THAT THIS IS REALLY COLOSSUS--NO FAKE, NO TRICK! HOW CAN THAT BE?!
G'DAY, SHRIMP.
AHHRR!!
***S'YM'S** THE NAME, ENFORCING'S THE GAME.*
WHAM!
YOUR BUDDY THERE IS AN EXAMPLE OF S'YM'S HANDIWORK. NOT BAD, eh?
WORD IS YOU'RE A PRETTY ROUGH'N'TOUGH LITTLE HOSER YOURSELF.
THAT'S RIGHT, BUB.
SNIKT!
*S'YM IS SUITABLY **IMPRESSED.***
KLUD!

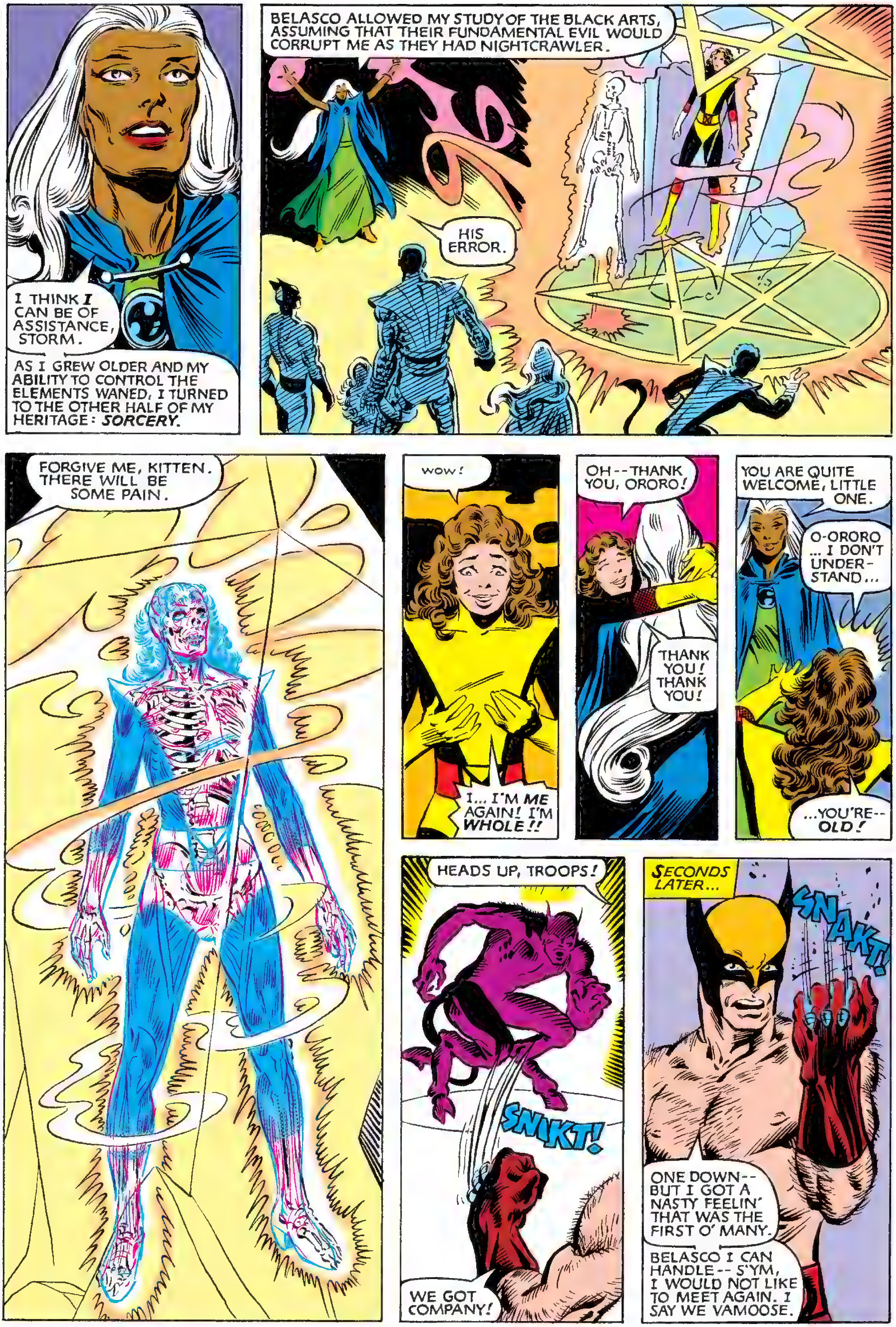

STILL BREATHING?
THAT IS EASILY REMEDIED.
THOOM
THOSE TELEPORT CIRCLES CAN BE A ROYAL **PAIN**. THEY APPEAR WITHOUT WARNING, RHYME OR REASON, AND TRANSPORT A BODY NOT ONLY THROUGH SPACE, BUT TIME AS WELL. THE RUNT COULD BE ANYWHERE, ANYWHEN.
IF YOU SEEK A FOE, VILLAIN--
--TRY **ME!**
THAT CORPSE-- IS **ME?!**
YIELD, OR SUFFER THE CONSEQUENCES.
YOU HAVE GUTS, FELLA, AND STYLE, NO DENYING THAT.
BUT A **BLUFF** WON'T DECIDE THIS CONTEST--**POWER** WILL!
THAK!
MY **SHOULDER!**

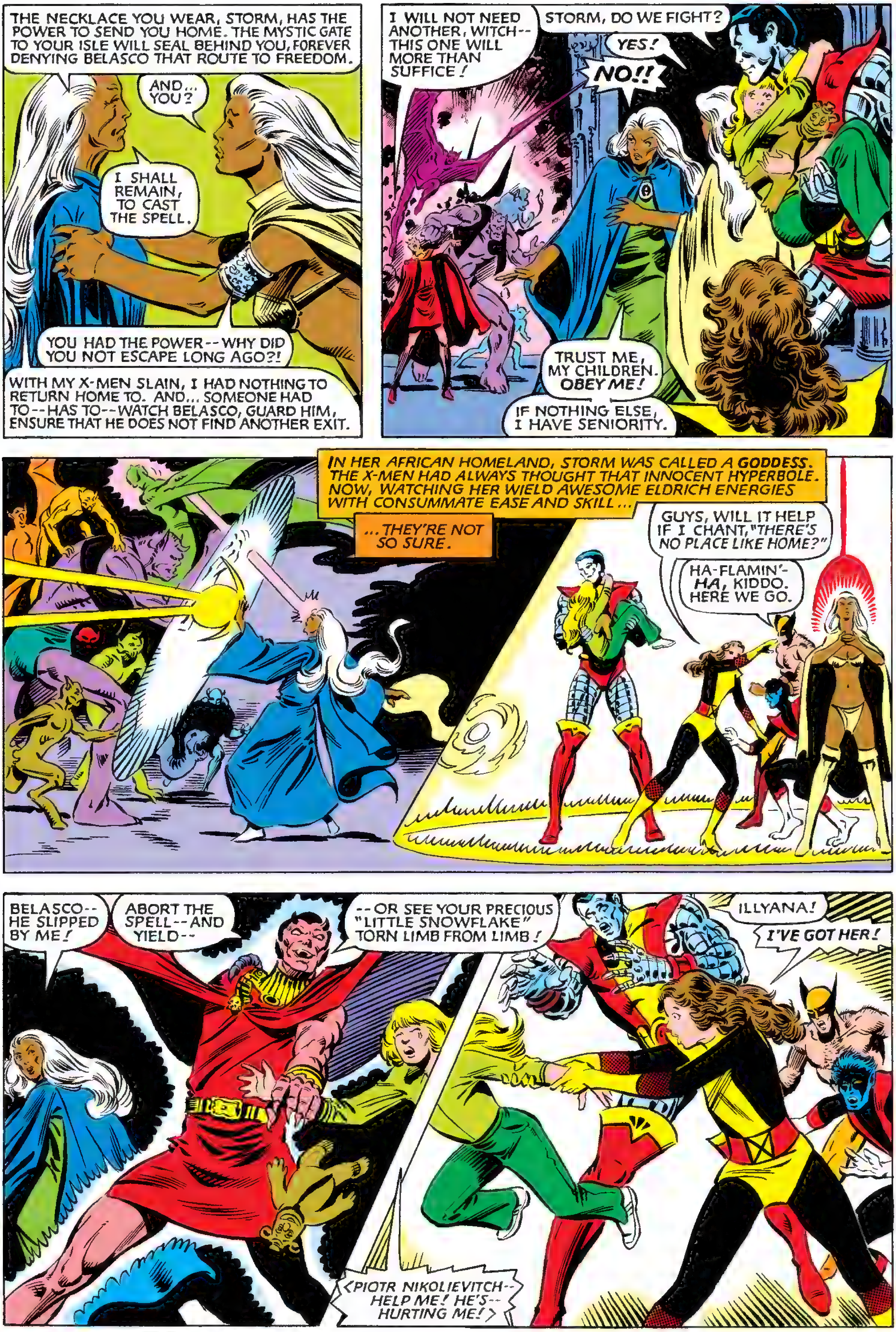

ONE OF WOLVERINE'S CLAWS!
IT PENETRATED MY ARMORED FORM! THE CREATURE'S STRENGTH IS BEYOND BELIEF!
THAT WAS A DEMONSTRATION. MAKE THINGS EASY ON YOURSELF, COLOSSUS--GIVE UP.
S'YM PROMISES S'YM WILL KILL YOU QUICKLY.
MY APOLOGIES, S'YM. I DO NOT INTEND TO DIE AT ALL.
HIS SPEED...
...RIVALS HIS STRENGTH.
THAT'S WHAT **YOU** THINK.
I CANNOT MATCH HIS RAW POWER.
I MUST FIND WAYS TO TURN IT AGAINST HIM.
SCOTT--CYCLOPS--TAUGHT ME HOW TO FIGHT.
HIS GRIP--TIGHTENING! CANNOT GAIN PROPER... LEVERAGE TO... BREAK FREE. I FEAR SCOTT'S EFFORTS... MAY HAVE BEEN... FOR NAUGHT.
YEEEOWWWW!
SNIKT!
HI THERE. REMEMBER ME?

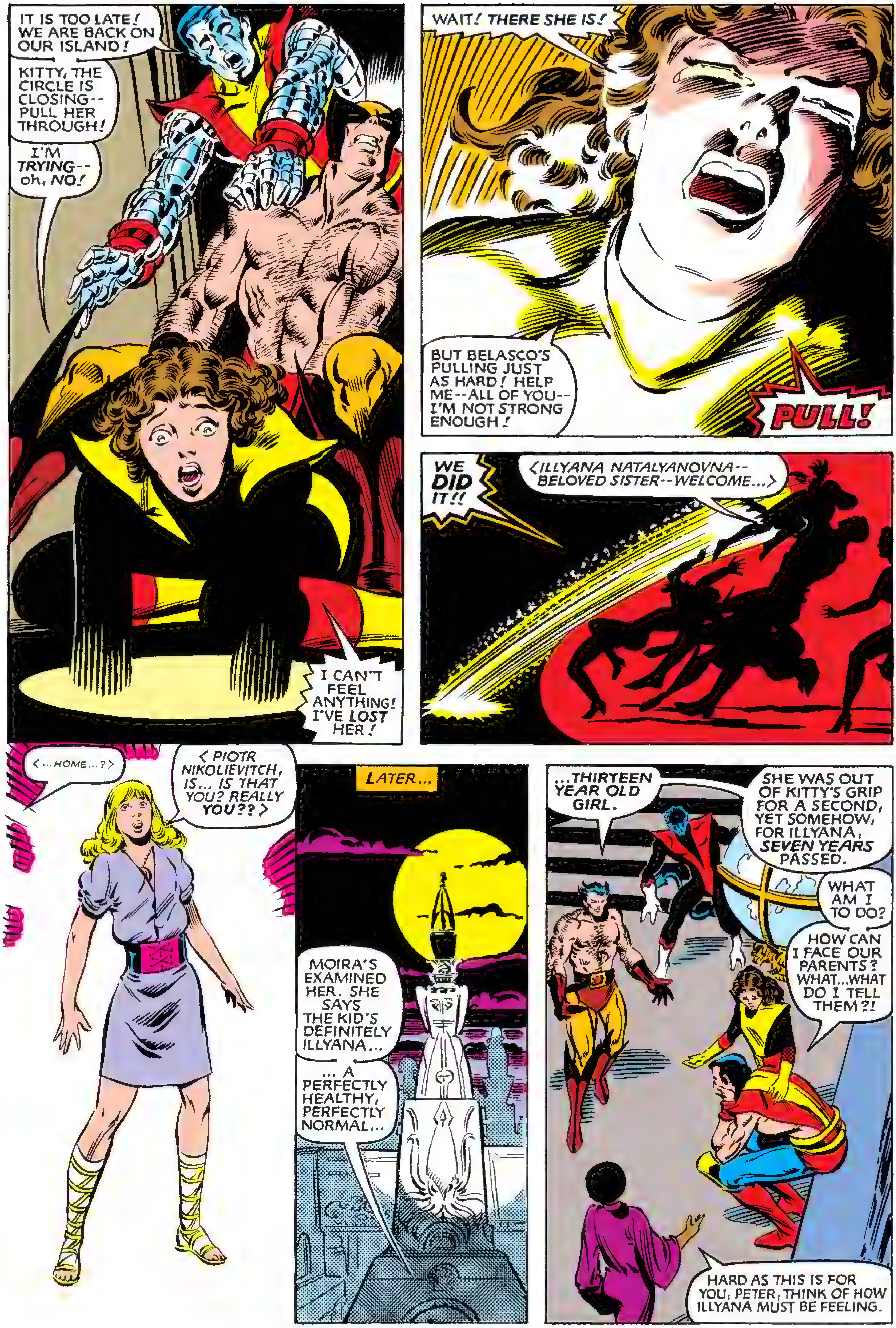

S'YM TRIES TO BE CONSIDERATE, TRIES TO BE MERCIFUL-- AND WHAT DOES IT GET HIM?!
GRIEF, BUB!
AN' THIS...
...IS ONLY...
...THE BEGINNING!
WRONG, RUNT.
CRIPES, HE AIN'T EVEN SCRATCHED!
OOOOOOO
I DO NOT LIKE STRIKING FROM BEHIND--IT IS DISHONORABLE--
COLOSSUS-- WHAT?! NO!
--BUT IN YOUR CASE, MONSTER, I WILL GLADLY MAKE AN EXCEPTION!
BON VOYAGE, COMRADE S'YM.
A TELEPORT CIRCLE! YOU LOUSY, STINKING...

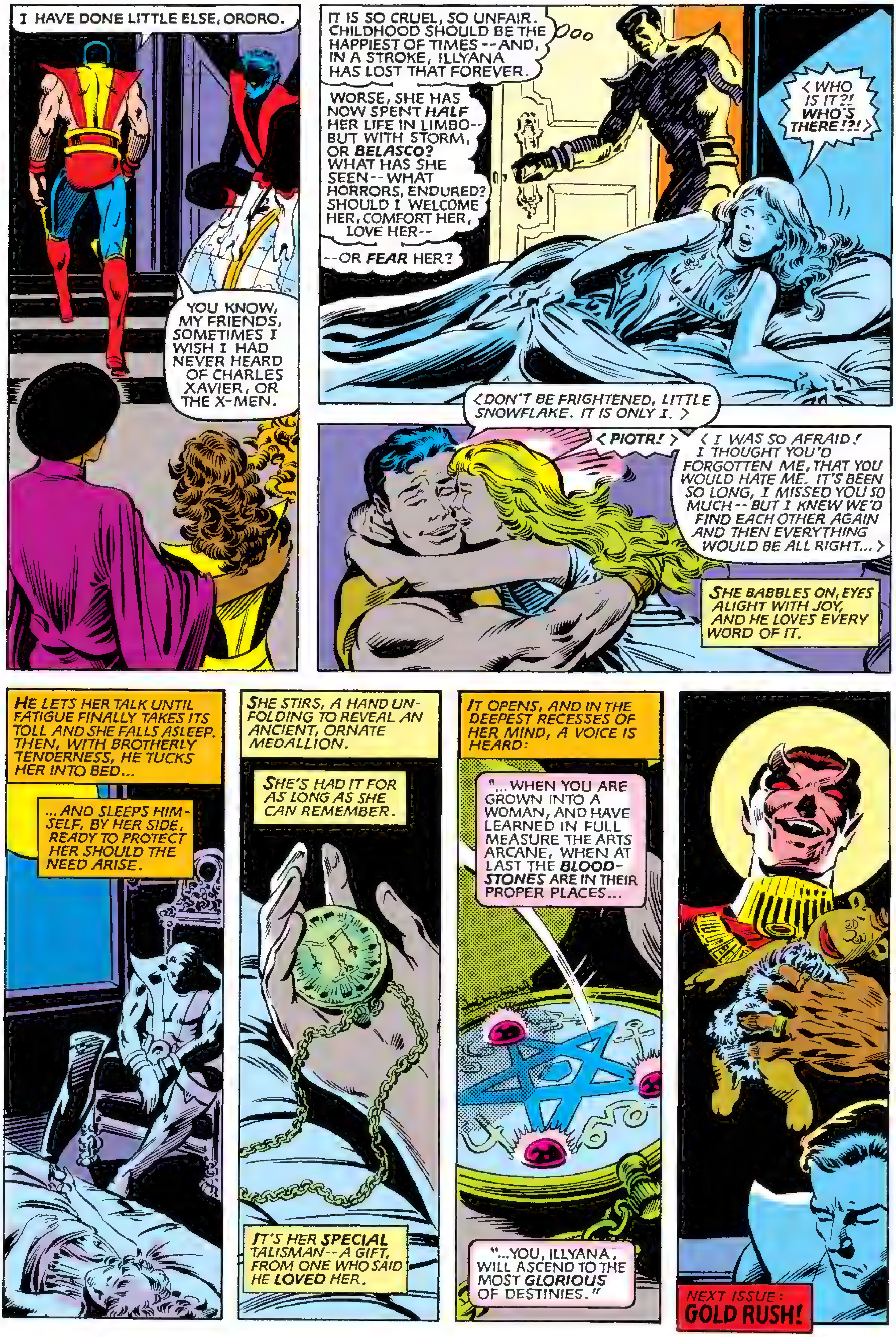

I AM GRATEFUL FOR YOUR TIMELY ARRIVAL, WOLVERINE. THAT WAS MORE LUCK THAN I DESERVE.
LUCK HAD NOTHIN' TO DO WITH IT, PAL. THANK THE LADY HERE. HER MAGIC BROUGHT ME BACK TO YOU AN' S'YM.
HER SCENT-- I *KNOW* IT! BUT THAT'S IMPOSSIBLE!
LOGAN HAS RECOGNIZED ME -- AND IS APPROPRIATELY CONFUSED. HE WILL LEARN THE TRUTH SOON ENOUGH, I FEAR.
YOUR FRIENDS HAVE NEED OF YOU.
I SHALL SEND YOU TO THEM.
WAIT A MINUTE, LADY! WHAT ABOUT...
...*YOU?!*
K-KATYA--?!
SO, X-MEN, WE MEET AT LAST...
...FOR THE FIRST-- AND *FINAL*-- TIME.
NO, BELASCO!
UNNGNH!
YOUR REIGN OF TERROR IS OVER!
KURT, AWAY FROM HIM!
STORM--!
BUT YOUNG AND VITAL-- AT THE PEAK OF HER ELEMENTAL POWERS!
BAMF
YOU HAVE ME AT A DISADVANTAGE, X-MEN.
A SITUATION THAT WILL SOON BE REMEDIED!


QUICKLY, HALTINGLY, NIGHTCRAWLER TELLS ALL THAT HE HAS SEEN AND HEARD...
... I DEFEATED MY EVIL DOPPELGÄNGER, TOOK HIS CLOTHES, PLAYED HIS PART.
BUT STORM, WHAT OF KITTY?! IF SHE IS REMOVED FROM HER CRYSTAL PRISON... WITHOUT HER SKELETON...
BELASCO--!
BELASCO!!
BY MY HEART AND SOUL, YOU SHALL PAY FOR THIS-- IF IT TAKES ME 'TIL THE END OF TIME!
SHE SUMMONS A HURRICANE TO SWEEP HER AFTER THE DEMON LORD...
...BUT SUDDENLY, SURPRISINGLY...
...THE WIND TURNS ON HER, STOPS HER IN MID-FLIGHT.
NO, WIND-RIDER. THAT YOU MUST NOT DO.
WHY NOT?! WHO ARE YOU, STRANGER...
... TO COMMAND THE X-MEN?!
SEE FOR YOURSELF.
I, TOO, FACED THIS CHOICE. I FOLLOWED BELASCO, MY FRIENDS FOLLOWED ME. THEY DIED. I... WAS DAMNED. I WILL NOT ALLOW THAT TRAGEDY TO HAPPEN AGAIN.
PHANTASTICH! BELASCO SPOKE OF THIS. WE ARE IN A MAGICKAL LIMBO...
...WHERE NONE OF THE RULES OF SPACE AND TIME APPLY. WE CAN BE BOTH OLD AND YOUNG, ALIVE AND DEAD, GOOD AND... EVIL.
SPARE ME YOUR PHILOSOPHY, KURT. IF YOU WISH TO BE OF USE...
... FIND ME A WAY TO SAVE KITTY.


I THINK *I* CAN BE OF ASSISTANCE, STORM.
AS I GREW OLDER AND MY ABILITY TO CONTROL THE ELEMENTS WANED, I TURNED TO THE OTHER HALF OF MY HERITAGE: *SORCERY.*
BELASCO ALLOWED MY STUDY OF THE BLACK ARTS, ASSUMING THAT THEIR FUNDAMENTAL EVIL WOULD CORRUPT ME AS THEY HAD NIGHTCRAWLER.
HIS ERROR.
FORGIVE ME, KITTEN. THERE WILL BE SOME PAIN.
WOW!
I... I'M *ME* AGAIN! I'M *WHOLE!!*
OH--THANK YOU, ORORO!
THANK YOU! THANK YOU!
YOU ARE QUITE WELCOME, LITTLE ONE.
O-ORORO ... I DON'T UNDERSTAND...
...YOU'RE--*OLD!*
HEADS UP, TROOPS!
SNIKT!
WE GOT COMPANY!
SECONDS LATER...
SNAKT!
ONE DOWN--BUT I GOT A NASTY FEELIN' THAT WAS THE FIRST O' MANY.
BELASCO I CAN HANDLE-- S'YM, I WOULD NOT LIKE TO MEET AGAIN. I SAY WE VAMOOSE.


THE NECKLACE YOU WEAR, STORM, HAS THE POWER TO SEND YOU HOME. THE MYSTIC GATE TO YOUR ISLE WILL SEAL BEHIND YOU, FOREVER DENYING BELASCO THAT ROUTE TO FREEDOM.
AND... YOU?
I SHALL REMAIN, TO CAST THE SPELL.
YOU HAD THE POWER--WHY DID YOU NOT ESCAPE LONG AGO?!
WITH MY X-MEN SLAIN, I HAD NOTHING TO RETURN HOME TO. AND... SOMEONE HAD TO--HAS TO--WATCH BELASCO, GUARD HIM, ENSURE THAT HE DOES NOT FIND ANOTHER EXIT.
I WILL NOT NEED ANOTHER, WITCH-- THIS ONE WILL MORE THAN SUFFICE!
STORM, DO WE FIGHT?
YES!
NO!!
TRUST ME, MY CHILDREN. OBEY ME!
IF NOTHING ELSE, I HAVE SENIORITY.
IN HER AFRICAN HOMELAND, STORM WAS CALLED A GODDESS. THE X-MEN HAD ALWAYS THOUGHT THAT INNOCENT HYPERBOLE. NOW, WATCHING HER WIELD AWESOME ELDRICH ENERGIES WITH CONSUMMATE EASE AND SKILL...
...THEY'RE NOT SO SURE.
GUYS, WILL IT HELP IF I CHANT, "THERE'S NO PLACE LIKE HOME?"
HA-FLAMIN'-HA, KIDDO. HERE WE GO.
BELASCO-- HE SLIPPED BY ME!
ABORT THE SPELL--AND YIELD--
--OR SEE YOUR PRECIOUS "LITTLE SNOWFLAKE" TORN LIMB FROM LIMB!
ILLYANA!
I'VE GOT HER!
<PIOTR NIKOLIEVITCH-- HELP ME! HE'S-- HURTING ME!>


IT IS TOO LATE! WE ARE BACK ON OUR ISLAND!
KITTY, THE CIRCLE IS CLOSING-- PULL HER THROUGH!
I'M TRYING-- oh, NO!
I CAN'T FEEL ANYTHING! I'VE LOST HER!
WAIT! THERE SHE IS!
BUT BELASCO'S PULLING JUST AS HARD! HELP ME--ALL OF YOU-- I'M NOT STRONG ENOUGH!
PULL!
WE DID IT!!
<ILLYANA NATALYANOVNA-- BELOVED SISTER--WELCOME...>
<...HOME...?>
< PIOTR NIKOLIEVITCH, IS... IS THAT YOU? REALLY YOU??>
LATER...
MOIRA'S EXAMINED HER. SHE SAYS THE KID'S DEFINITELY ILLYANA...
... A PERFECTLY HEALTHY, PERFECTLY NORMAL...
...THIRTEEN YEAR OLD GIRL.
SHE WAS OUT OF KITTY'S GRIP FOR A SECOND, YET SOMEHOW, FOR ILLYANA, SEVEN YEARS PASSED.
WHAT AM I TO DO?
HOW CAN I FACE OUR PARENTS? WHAT...WHAT DO I TELL THEM?!
HARD AS THIS IS FOR YOU, PETER, THINK OF HOW ILLYANA MUST BE FEELING.


I HAVE DONE LITTLE ELSE, ORORO.
YOU KNOW, MY FRIENDS, SOMETIMES I WISH I HAD NEVER HEARD OF CHARLES XAVIER, OR THE X-MEN.
IT IS SO CRUEL, SO UNFAIR. CHILDHOOD SHOULD BE THE HAPPIEST OF TIMES--AND, IN A STROKE, ILLYANA HAS LOST THAT FOREVER.
WORSE, SHE HAS NOW SPENT HALF HER LIFE IN LIMBO--BUT WITH STORM, OR BELASCO? WHAT HAS SHE SEEN--WHAT HORRORS, ENDURED? SHOULD I WELCOME HER, COMFORT HER, LOVE HER--
--OR FEAR HER?
< WHO IS IT?! WHO'S THERE!?! >
<DON'T BE FRIGHTENED, LITTLE SNOWFLAKE. IT IS ONLY I. >
< PIOTR! >
< I WAS SO AFRAID! I THOUGHT YOU'D FORGOTTEN ME, THAT YOU WOULD HATE ME. IT'S BEEN SO LONG, I MISSED YOU SO MUCH--BUT I KNEW WE'D FIND EACH OTHER AGAIN AND THEN EVERYTHING WOULD BE ALL RIGHT... >
SHE BABBLES ON, EYES ALIGHT WITH JOY, AND HE LOVES EVERY WORD OF IT.
HE LETS HER TALK UNTIL FATIGUE FINALLY TAKES ITS TOLL AND SHE FALLS ASLEEP. THEN, WITH BROTHERLY TENDERNESS, HE TUCKS HER INTO BED...
...AND SLEEPS HIMSELF, BY HER SIDE, READY TO PROTECT HER SHOULD THE NEED ARISE.
SHE STIRS, A HAND UNFOLDING TO REVEAL AN ANCIENT, ORNATE MEDALLION.
SHE'S HAD IT FOR AS LONG AS SHE CAN REMEMBER.
IT'S HER SPECIAL TALISMAN--A GIFT, FROM ONE WHO SAID HE LOVED HER.
IT OPENS, AND IN THE DEEPEST RECESSES OF HER MIND, A VOICE IS HEARD:
"...WHEN YOU ARE GROWN INTO A WOMAN, AND HAVE LEARNED IN FULL MEASURE THE ARTS ARCANE, WHEN AT LAST THE BLOODSTONES ARE IN THEIR PROPER PLACES...
"...YOU, ILLYANA, WILL ASCEND TO THE MOST GLORIOUS OF DESTINIES."
NEXT ISSUE:
GOLD RUSH!

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STORM™ AND ILLYANA™
MAGIK™
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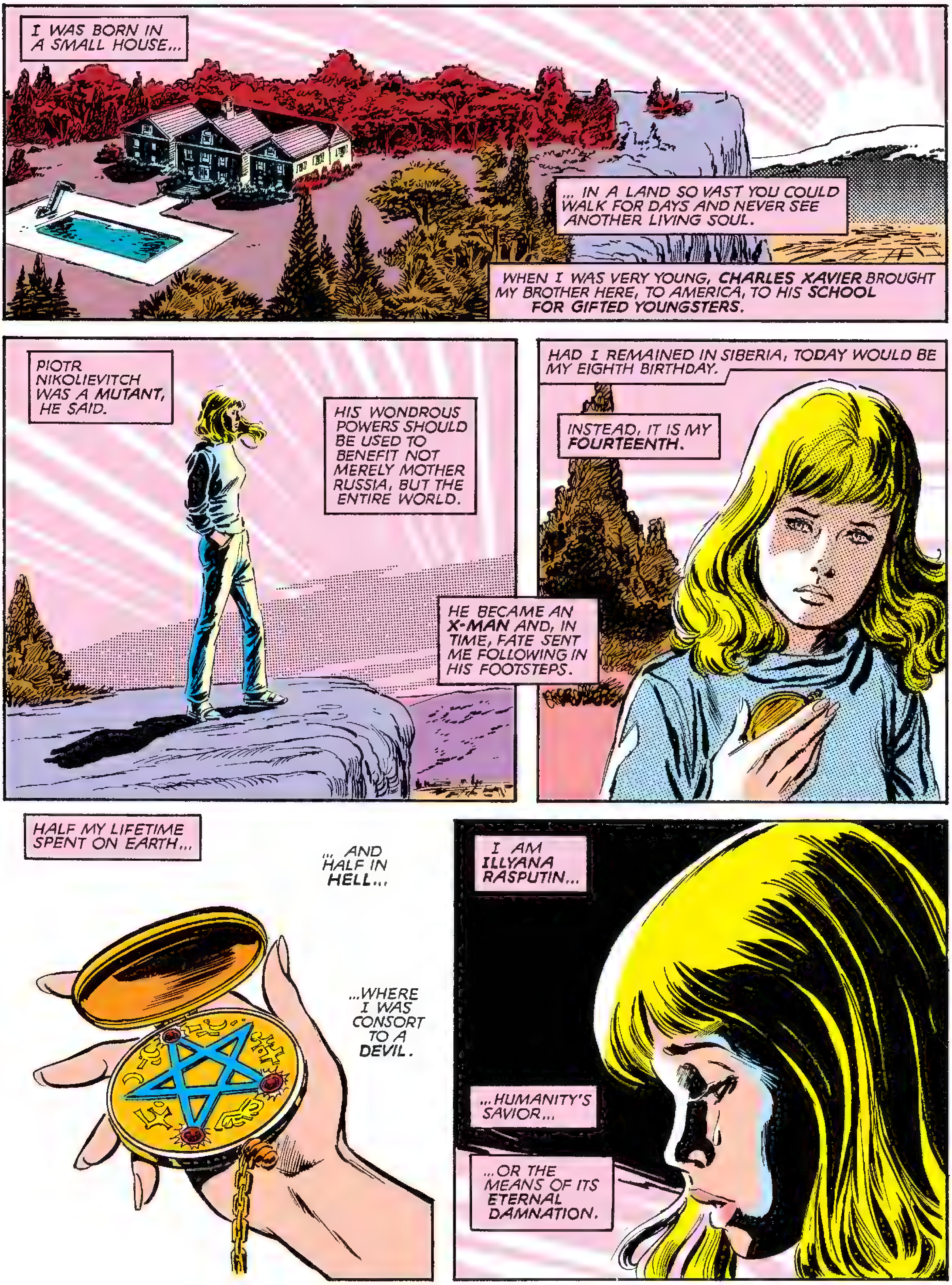
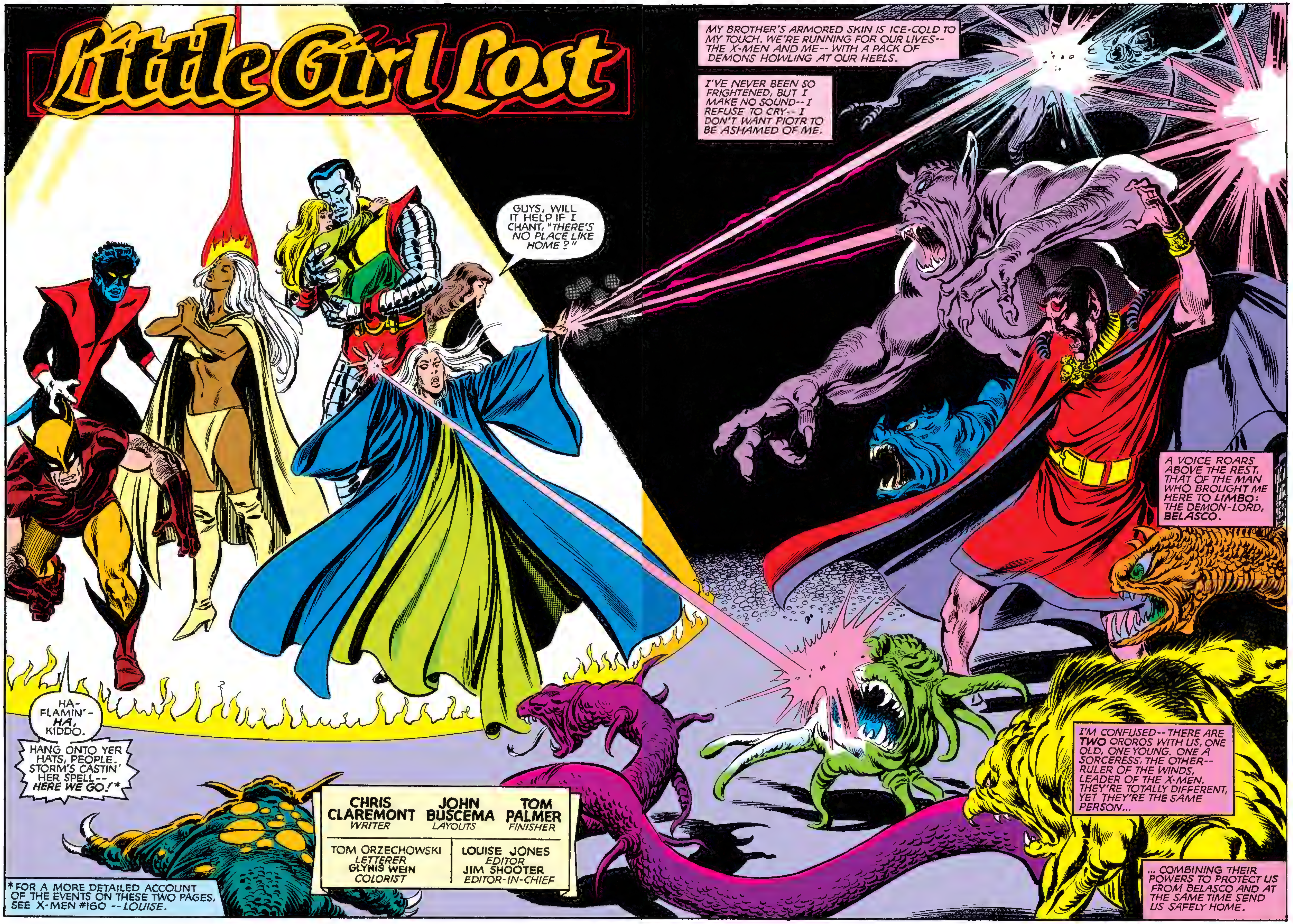

I WAS BORN IN A SMALL HOUSE...
... IN A LAND SO VAST YOU COULD WALK FOR DAYS AND NEVER SEE ANOTHER LIVING SOUL.
WHEN I WAS VERY YOUNG, **CHARLES XAVIER** BROUGHT MY BROTHER HERE, TO AMERICA, TO HIS **SCHOOL FOR GIFTED YOUNGSTERS.**
PIOTR NIKOLIEVITCH WAS A **MUTANT,** HE SAID.
HIS WONDROUS POWERS SHOULD BE USED TO BENEFIT NOT MERELY MOTHER RUSSIA, BUT THE ENTIRE WORLD.
HE BECAME AN **X-MAN** AND, IN TIME, FATE SENT ME FOLLOWING IN HIS FOOTSTEPS.
HAD I REMAINED IN SIBERIA, TODAY WOULD BE MY EIGHTH BIRTHDAY.
INSTEAD, IT IS MY **FOURTEENTH.**
HALF MY LIFETIME SPENT ON EARTH...
... AND HALF IN **HELL...**
...WHERE I WAS CONSORT TO A **DEVIL.**
I AM **ILLYANA RASPUTIN...**
...HUMANITY'S SAVIOR...
...OR THE MEANS OF ITS **ETERNAL DAMNATION.**


Little Girl Lost
GUYS, WILL IT HELP IF I CHANT, "THERE'S NO PLACE LIKE HOME?"
HA-FLAMIN'-HA, KIDDO.
HANG ONTO YER HATS, PEOPLE. STORM'S CASTIN' HER SPELL-- HERE WE GO!*
MY BROTHER'S ARMORED SKIN IS ICE-COLD TO MY TOUCH. WE'RE RUNNING FOR OUR LIVES-- THE X-MEN AND ME-- WITH A PACK OF DEMONS HOWLING AT OUR HEELS.
I'VE NEVER BEEN SO FRIGHTENED, BUT I MAKE NO SOUND-- I REFUSE TO CRY-- I DON'T WANT PIOTR TO BE ASHAMED OF ME.
A VOICE ROARS ABOVE THE REST, THAT OF THE MAN WHO BROUGHT ME HERE TO LIMBO: THE DEMON-LORD, BELASCO.
I'M CONFUSED-- THERE ARE TWO OROROS WITH US, ONE OLD, ONE YOUNG. ONE A SORCERESS, THE OTHER-- RULER OF THE WINDS, LEADER OF THE X-MEN. THEY'RE TOTALLY DIFFERENT, YET THEY'RE THE SAME PERSON...
...COMBINING THEIR POWERS TO PROTECT US FROM BELASCO AND AT THE SAME TIME SEND US SAFELY HOME.
CHRIS CLAREMONT WRITER
JOHN BUSCEMA LAYOUTS
TOM PALMER FINISHER
TOM ORZECHOWSKI LETTERER
GLYNIS WEIN COLORIST
LOUISE JONES EDITOR
JIM SHOOTER EDITOR-IN-CHIEF
*FOR A MORE DETAILED ACCOUNT OF THE EVENTS ON THESE TWO PAGES, SEE X-MEN #160 --LOUISE.

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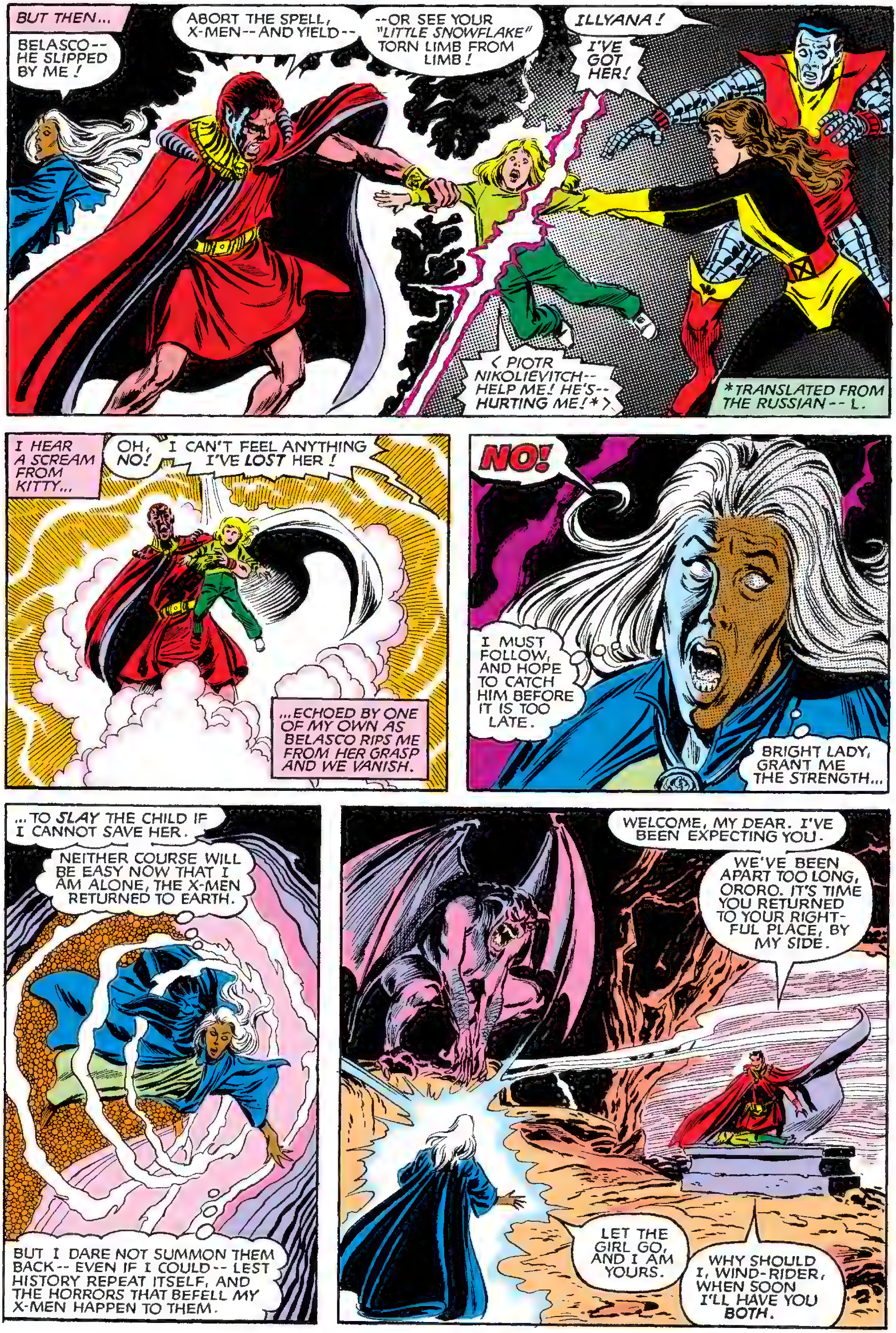
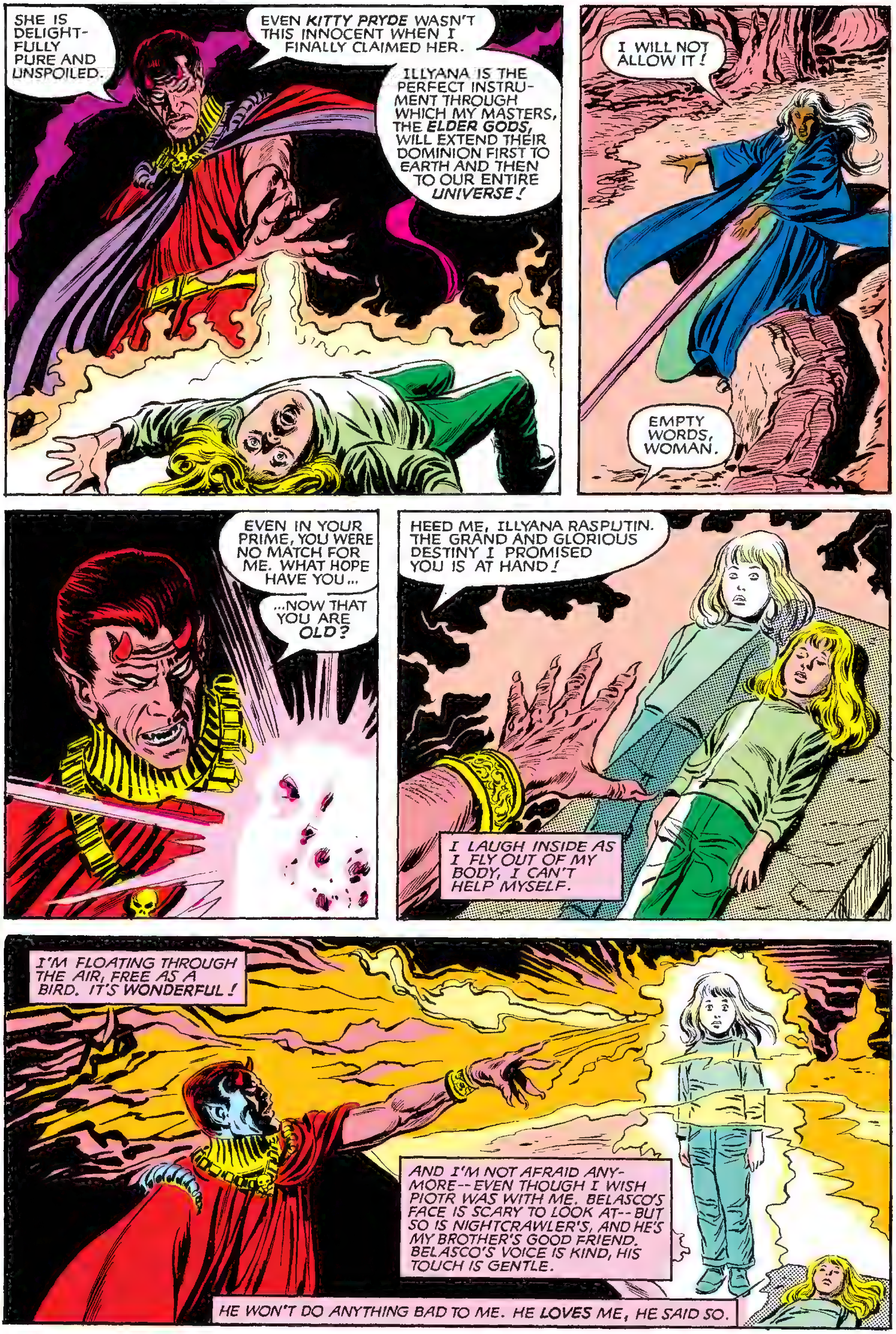
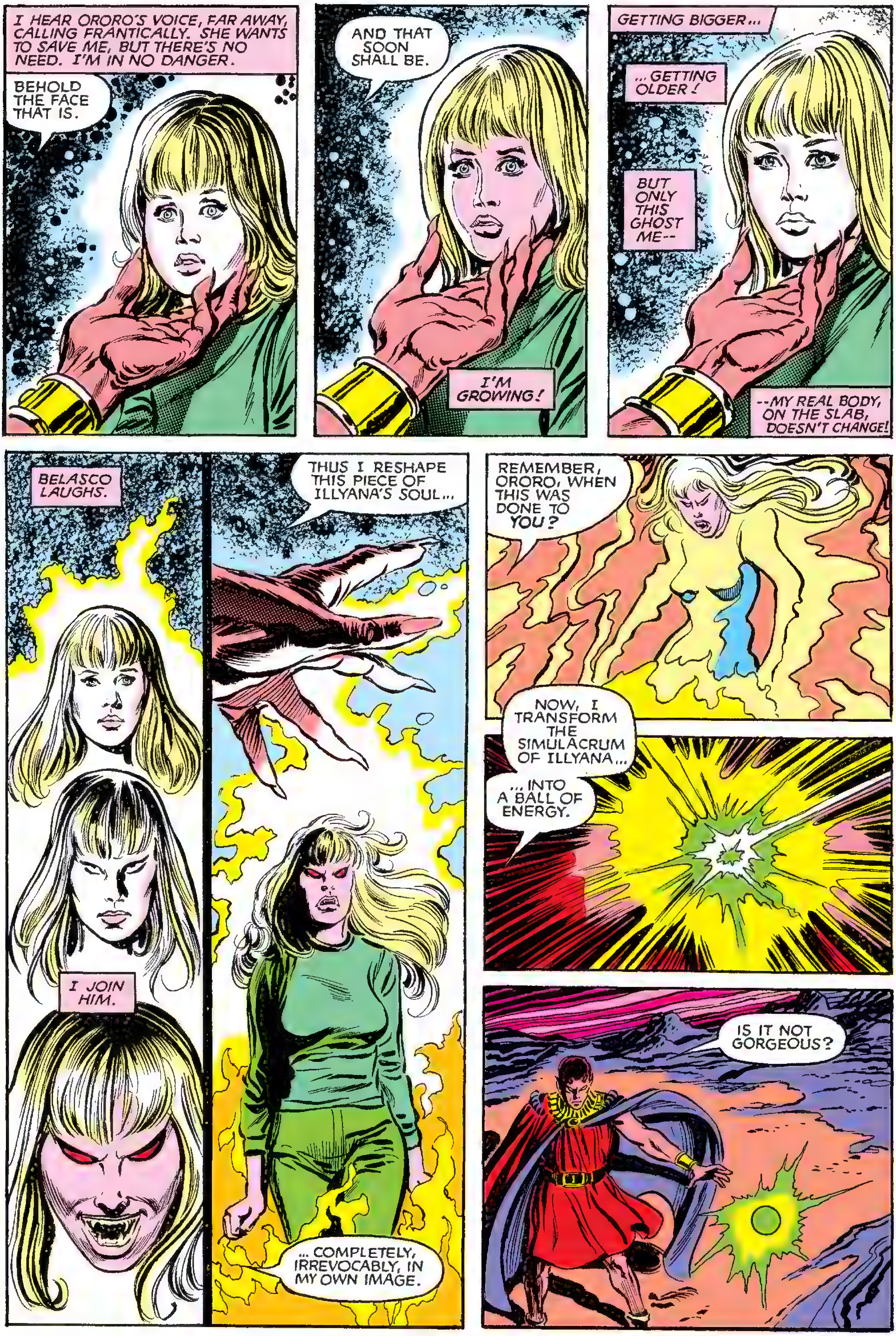
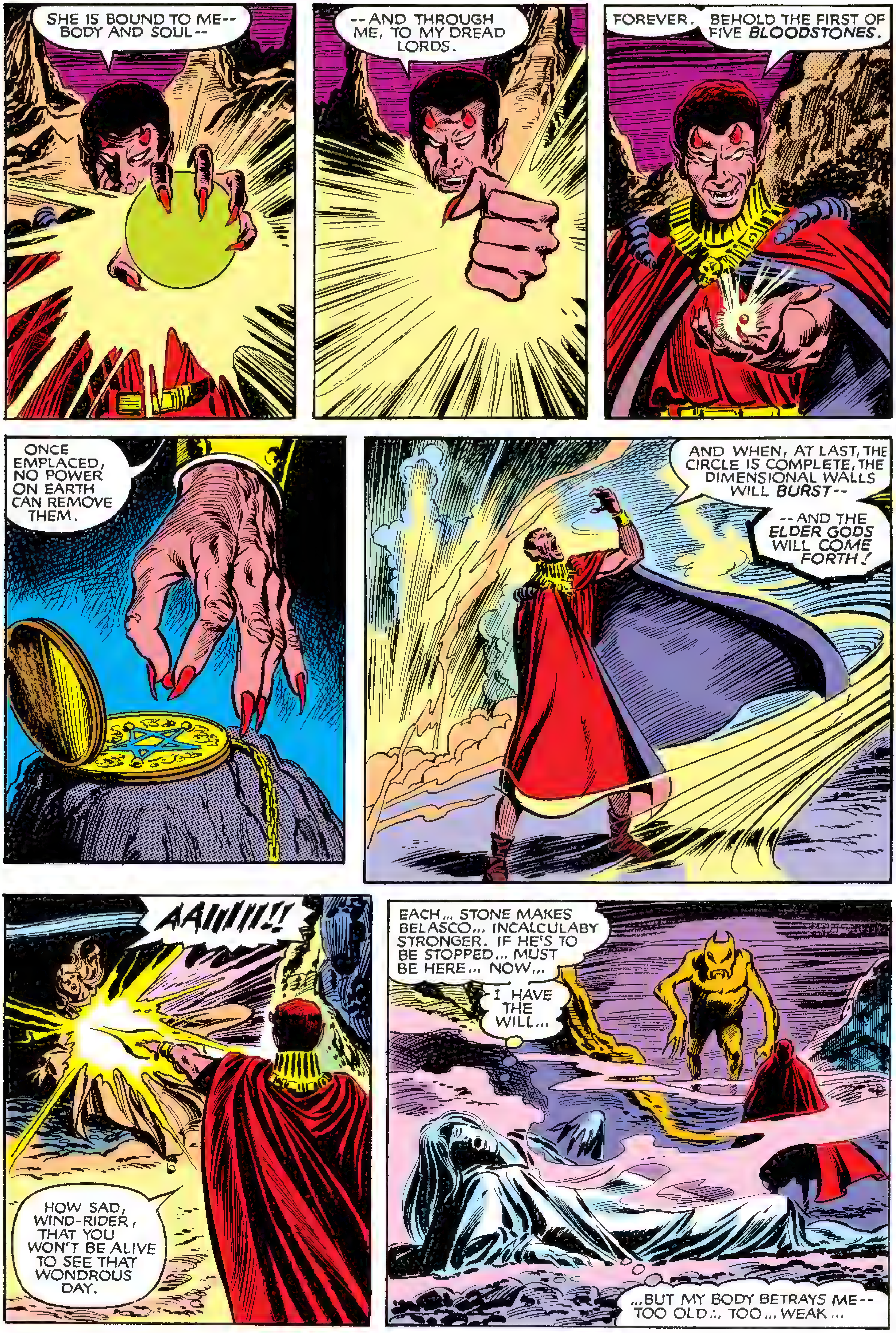
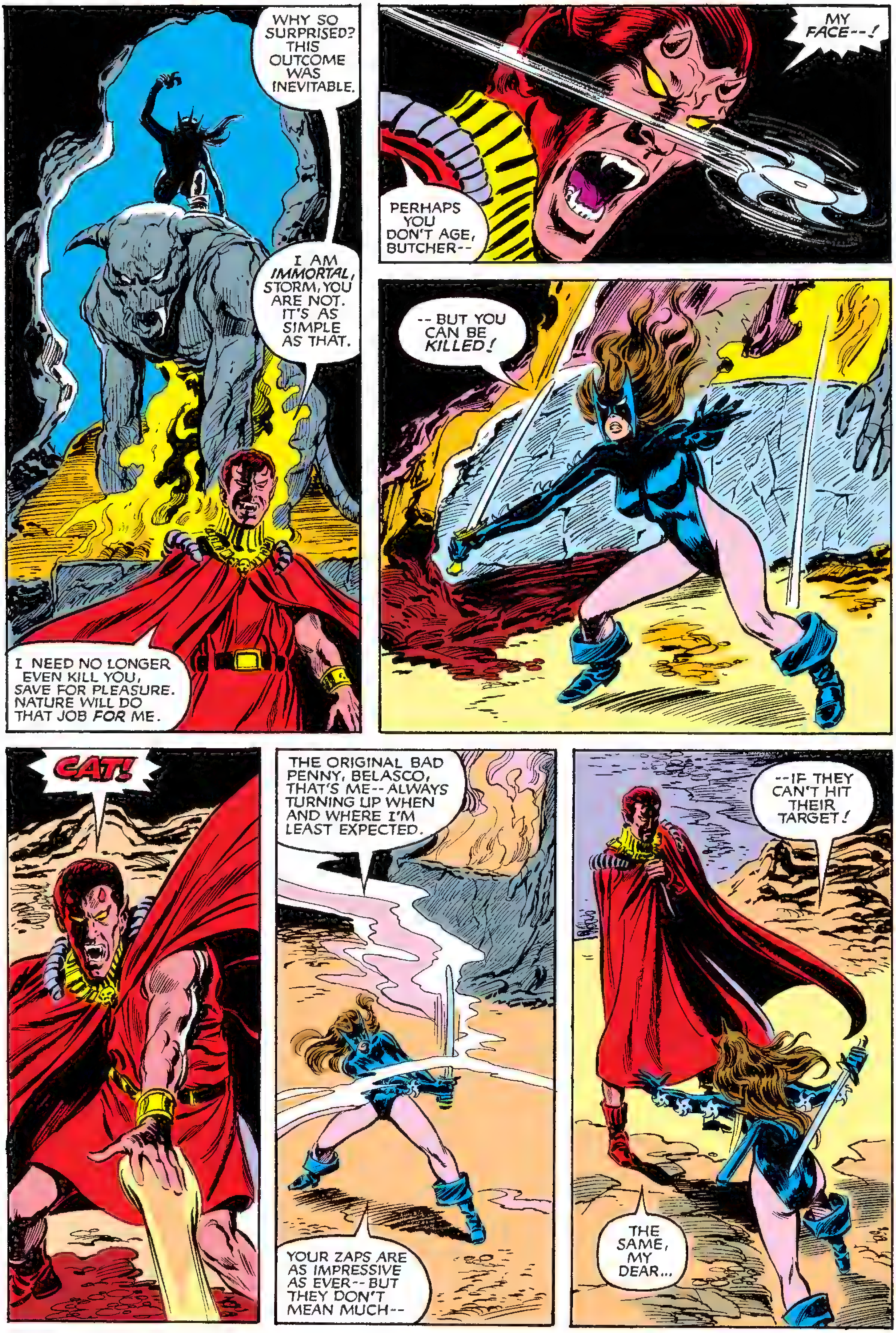
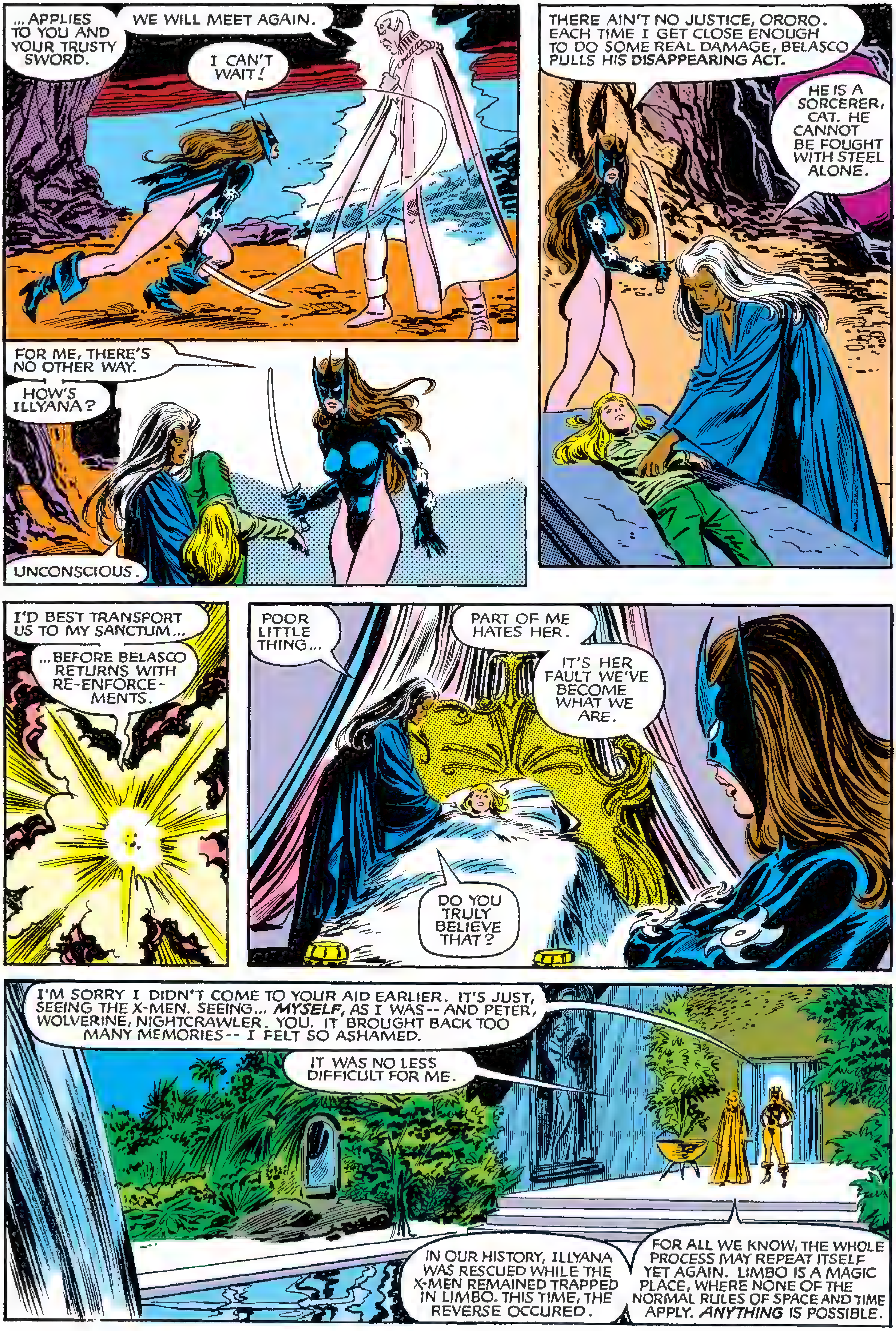

BUT THEN...
BELASCO-- HE SLIPPED BY ME!
ABORT THE SPELL, X-MEN-- AND YIELD--
--OR SEE YOUR "LITTLE SNOWFLAKE" TORN LIMB FROM LIMB!
ILLYANA!
I'VE GOT HER!
< PIOTR NIKOLIEVITCH-- HELP ME! HE'S-- HURTING ME!* >
*TRANSLATED FROM THE RUSSIAN -- L.
I HEAR A SCREAM FROM KITTY...
OH, NO!
I CAN'T FEEL ANYTHING I'VE LOST HER!
...ECHOED BY ONE OF MY OWN AS BELASCO RIPS ME FROM HER GRASP AND WE VANISH.
NO!
I MUST FOLLOW, AND HOPE TO CATCH HIM BEFORE IT IS TOO LATE.
BRIGHT LADY, GRANT ME THE STRENGTH...
...TO SLAY THE CHILD IF I CANNOT SAVE HER.
NEITHER COURSE WILL BE EASY NOW THAT I AM ALONE, THE X-MEN RETURNED TO EARTH.
BUT I DARE NOT SUMMON THEM BACK-- EVEN IF I COULD-- LEST HISTORY REPEAT ITSELF, AND THE HORRORS THAT BEFELL MY X-MEN HAPPEN TO THEM.
WELCOME, MY DEAR. I'VE BEEN EXPECTING YOU.
WE'VE BEEN APART TOO LONG, ORORO. IT'S TIME YOU RETURNED TO YOUR RIGHTFUL PLACE, BY MY SIDE.
LET THE GIRL GO, AND I AM YOURS.
WHY SHOULD I, WIND-RIDER, WHEN SOON I'LL HAVE YOU BOTH.

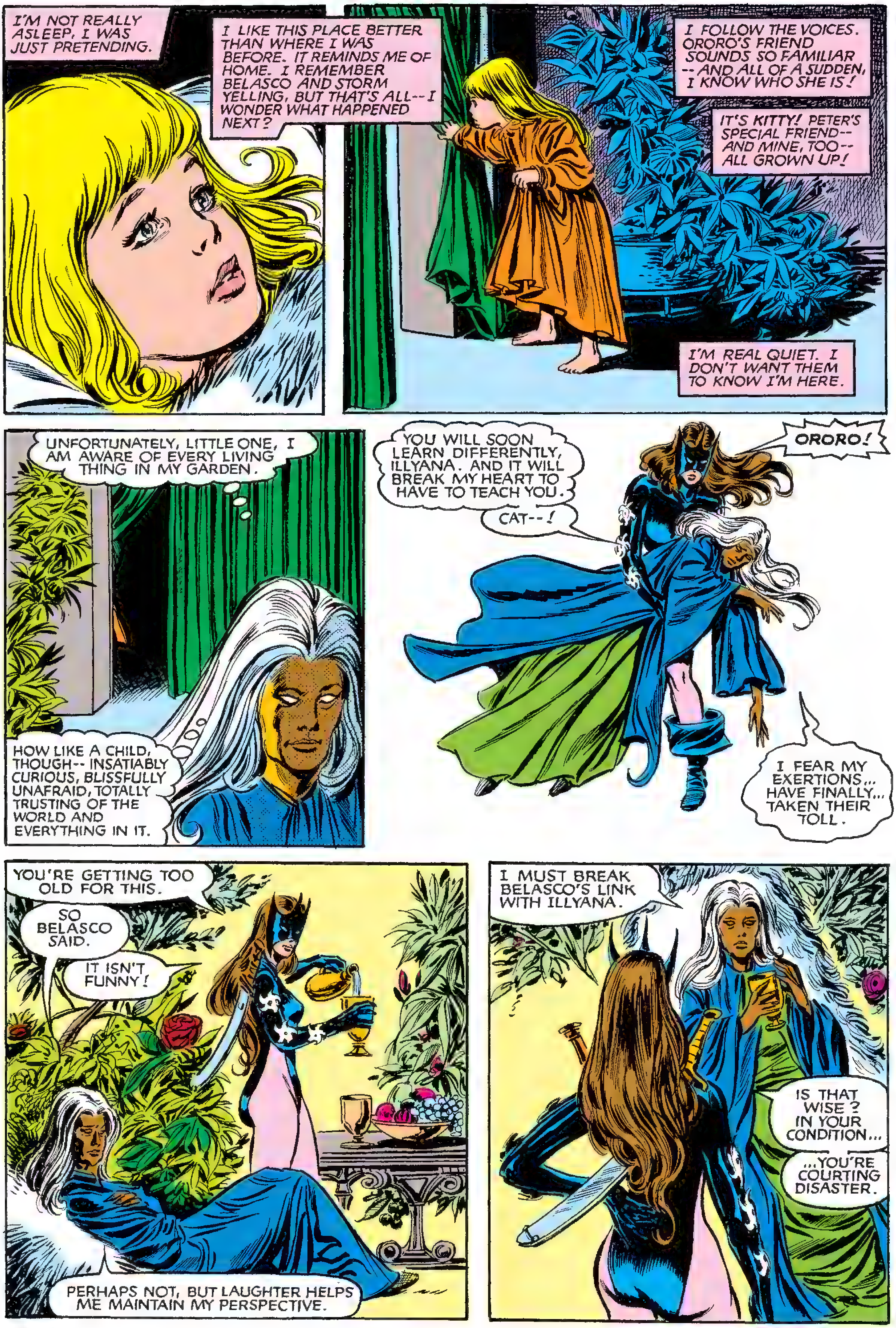

SHE IS DELIGHTFULLY PURE AND UNSPOILED.
EVEN *KITTY PRYDE* WASN'T THIS INNOCENT WHEN I FINALLY CLAIMED HER.
ILLYANA IS THE PERFECT INSTRUMENT THROUGH WHICH MY MASTERS, THE ***ELDER GODS,*** WILL EXTEND THEIR DOMINION FIRST TO EARTH AND THEN TO OUR ENTIRE *UNIVERSE!*
I WILL NOT ALLOW IT!
EMPTY WORDS, WOMAN.
EVEN IN YOUR PRIME, YOU WERE NO MATCH FOR ME. WHAT HOPE HAVE YOU...
...NOW THAT YOU ARE *OLD?*
HEED ME, ILLYANA RASPUTIN. THE GRAND AND GLORIOUS DESTINY I PROMISED YOU IS AT HAND!
I LAUGH INSIDE AS I FLY OUT OF MY BODY, I CAN'T HELP MYSELF.
I'M FLOATING THROUGH THE AIR, FREE AS A BIRD. IT'S WONDERFUL!
AND I'M NOT AFRAID ANYMORE--EVEN THOUGH I WISH PIOTR WAS WITH ME. BELASCO'S FACE IS SCARY TO LOOK AT--BUT SO IS NIGHTCRAWLER'S, AND HE'S MY BROTHER'S GOOD FRIEND. BELASCO'S VOICE IS KIND, HIS TOUCH IS GENTLE.
*HE WON'T DO ANYTHING BAD TO ME. HE **LOVES** ME, HE SAID SO.*

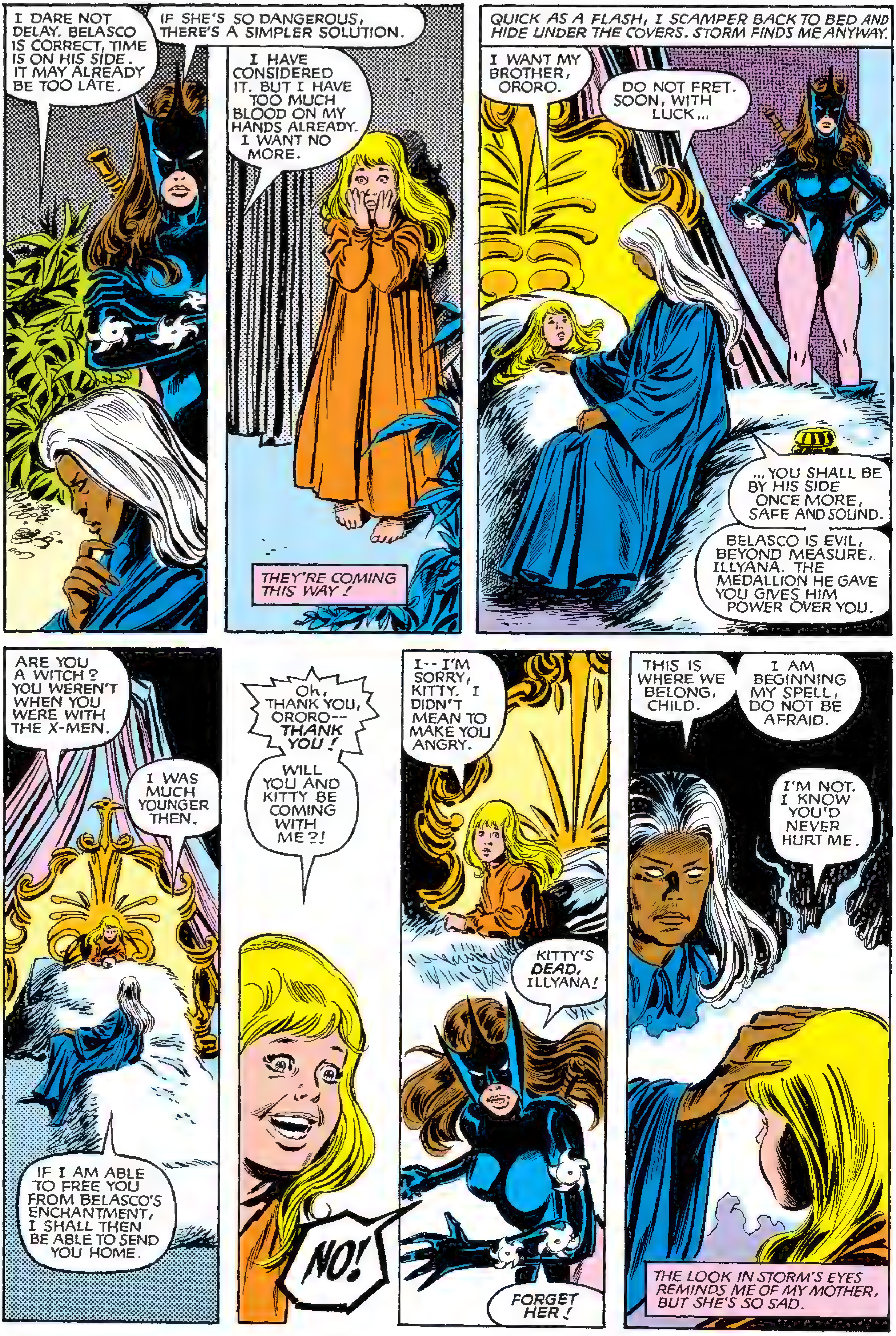

I HEAR ORORO'S VOICE, FAR AWAY, CALLING FRANTICALLY. SHE WANTS TO SAVE ME, BUT THERE'S NO NEED. I'M IN NO DANGER.
BEHOLD THE FACE THAT IS.
AND THAT SOON SHALL BE.
I'M GROWING!
GETTING BIGGER...
...GETTING OLDER!
BUT ONLY THIS GHOST ME--
--MY REAL BODY, ON THE SLAB, DOESN'T CHANGE!
BELASCO LAUGHS.
I JOIN HIM.
THUS I RESHAPE THIS PIECE OF ILLYANA'S SOUL...
...COMPLETELY, IRREVOCABLY, IN MY OWN IMAGE.
REMEMBER, ORORO, WHEN THIS WAS DONE TO YOU?
NOW, I TRANSFORM THE SIMULACRUM OF ILLYANA...
...INTO A BALL OF ENERGY.
IS IT NOT GORGEOUS?

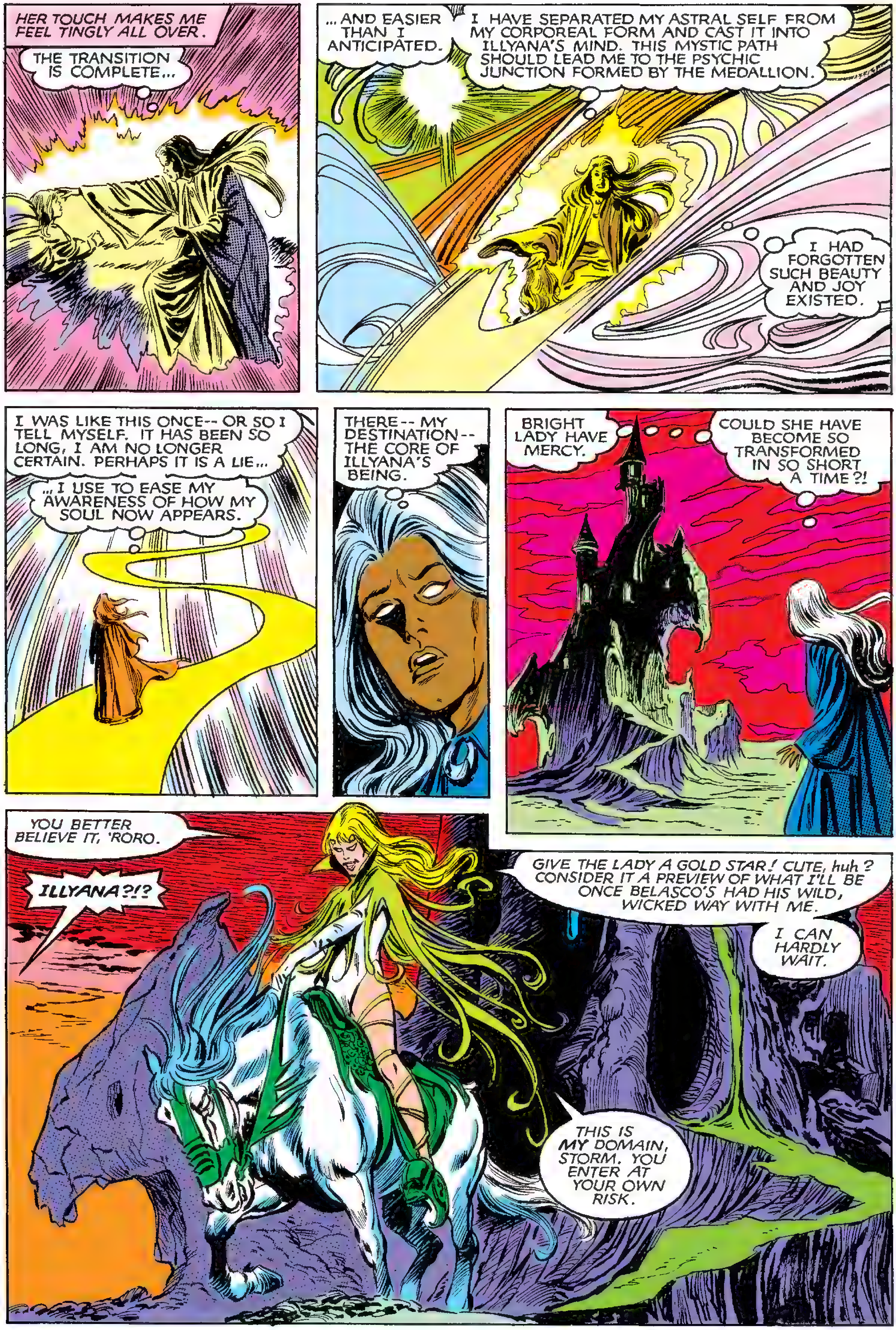

SHE IS BOUND TO ME-- BODY AND SOUL--
--AND THROUGH ME, TO MY DREAD LORDS.
FOREVER.
BEHOLD THE FIRST OF FIVE *BLOODSTONES*.
ONCE EMPLACED, NO POWER ON EARTH CAN REMOVE THEM.
AND WHEN, AT LAST, THE CIRCLE IS COMPLETE, THE DIMENSIONAL WALLS WILL *BURST*--
--AND THE *ELDER GODS* WILL COME FORTH!
AAIIIIII!!
HOW SAD, WIND-RIDER, THAT YOU WON'T BE ALIVE TO SEE THAT WONDROUS DAY.
EACH... STONE MAKES BELASCO... INCALCULABY STRONGER. IF HE'S TO BE STOPPED... MUST BE HERE... NOW...
I HAVE THE WILL...
...BUT MY BODY BETRAYS ME-- TOO OLD... TOO... WEAK...

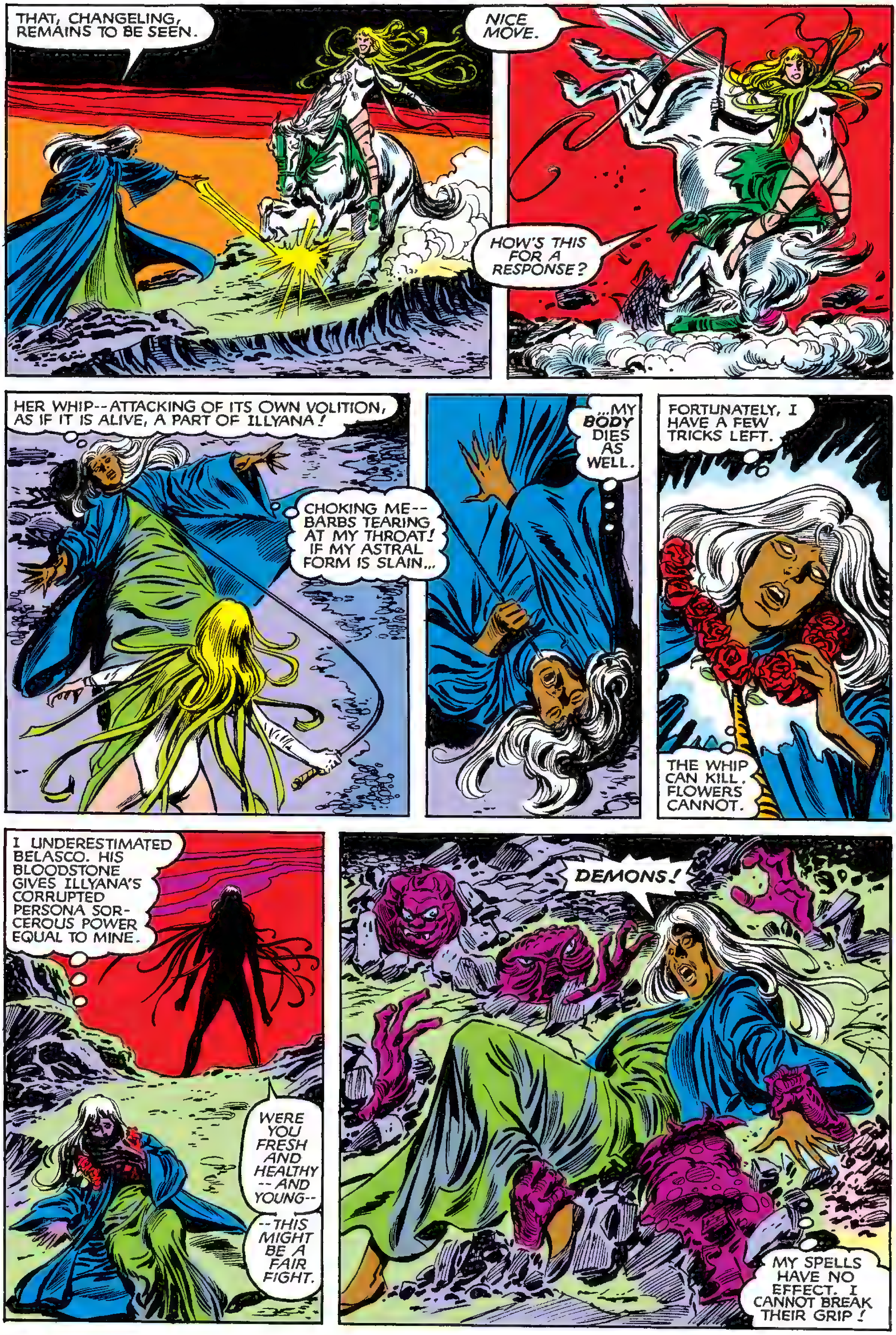

WHY SO SURPRISED? THIS OUTCOME WAS INEVITABLE.
I AM *IMMORTAL*, STORM. YOU ARE NOT. IT'S AS SIMPLE AS THAT.
I NEED NO LONGER EVEN KILL YOU, SAVE FOR PLEASURE. NATURE WILL DO THAT JOB *FOR* ME.
PERHAPS YOU DON'T AGE, BUTCHER--
MY *FACE*--!
-- BUT YOU CAN BE *KILLED*!
CAT!
THE ORIGINAL BAD PENNY, BELASCO, THAT'S ME-- ALWAYS TURNING UP WHEN AND WHERE I'M LEAST EXPECTED.
YOUR ZAPS ARE AS IMPRESSIVE AS EVER-- BUT THEY DON'T MEAN MUCH--
--IF THEY CAN'T HIT THEIR TARGET!
THE SAME, MY DEAR...

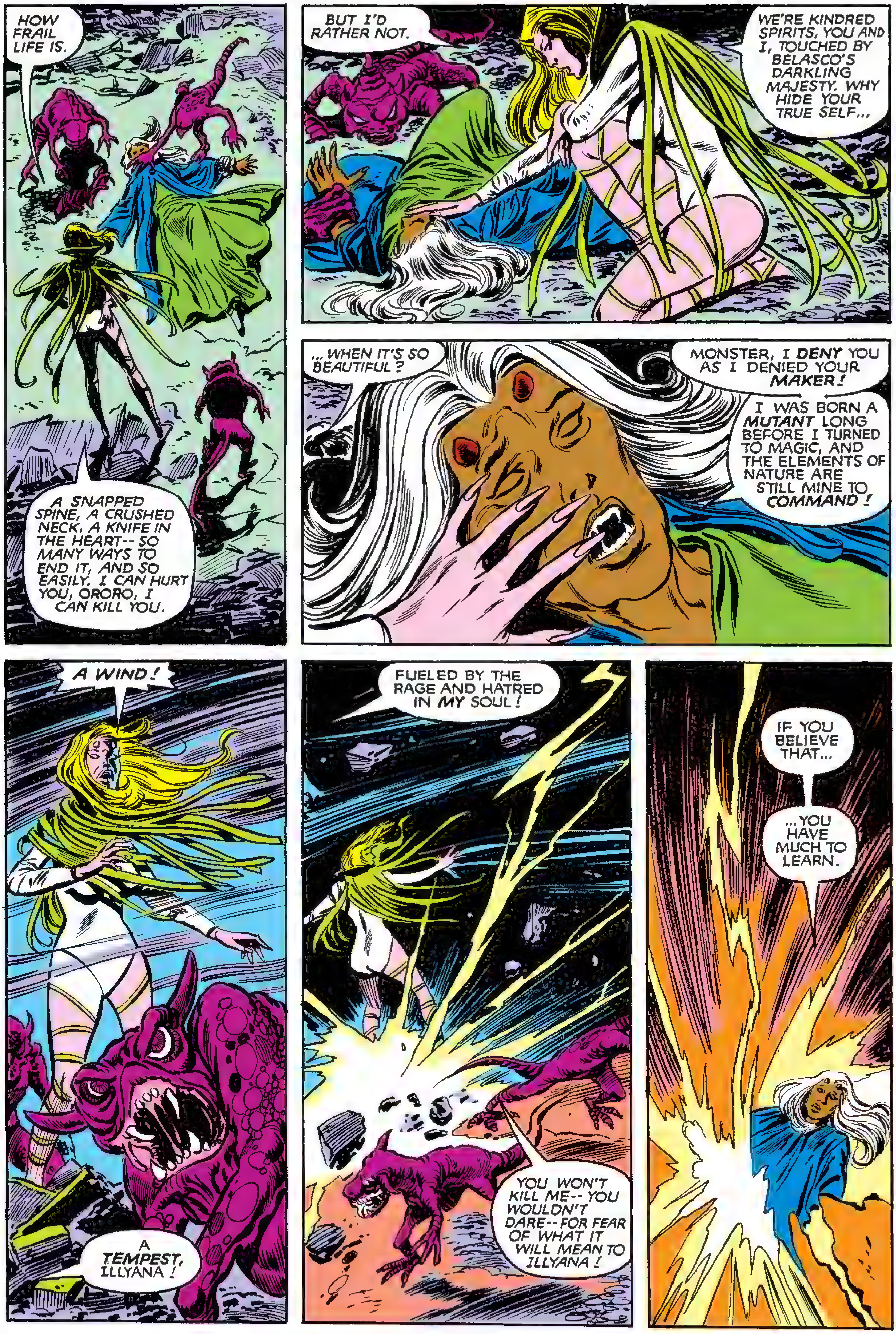

...APPLIES TO YOU AND YOUR TRUSTY SWORD.
WE WILL MEET AGAIN.
I CAN'T WAIT!
THERE AIN'T NO JUSTICE, ORORO. EACH TIME I GET CLOSE ENOUGH TO DO SOME REAL DAMAGE, BELASCO PULLS HIS DISAPPEARING ACT.
HE IS A SORCERER, CAT. HE CANNOT BE FOUGHT WITH STEEL ALONE.
FOR ME, THERE'S NO OTHER WAY.
HOW'S ILLYANA?
UNCONSCIOUS.
I'D BEST TRANSPORT US TO MY SANCTUM...
...BEFORE BELASCO RETURNS WITH RE-ENFORCEMENTS.
POOR LITTLE THING...
PART OF ME HATES HER.
IT'S HER FAULT WE'VE BECOME WHAT WE ARE.
DO YOU TRULY BELIEVE THAT?
I'M SORRY I DIDN'T COME TO YOUR AID EARLIER. IT'S JUST, SEEING THE X-MEN. SEEING... *MYSELF*, AS I WAS -- AND PETER, WOLVERINE, NIGHTCRAWLER. YOU. IT BROUGHT BACK TOO MANY MEMORIES -- I FELT SO ASHAMED.
IT WAS NO LESS DIFFICULT FOR ME.
IN OUR HISTORY, ILLYANA WAS RESCUED WHILE THE X-MEN REMAINED TRAPPED IN LIMBO. THIS TIME, THE REVERSE OCCURED.
FOR ALL WE KNOW, THE WHOLE PROCESS MAY REPEAT ITSELF YET AGAIN. LIMBO IS A MAGIC PLACE, WHERE NONE OF THE NORMAL RULES OF SPACE AND TIME APPLY. *ANYTHING* IS POSSIBLE.

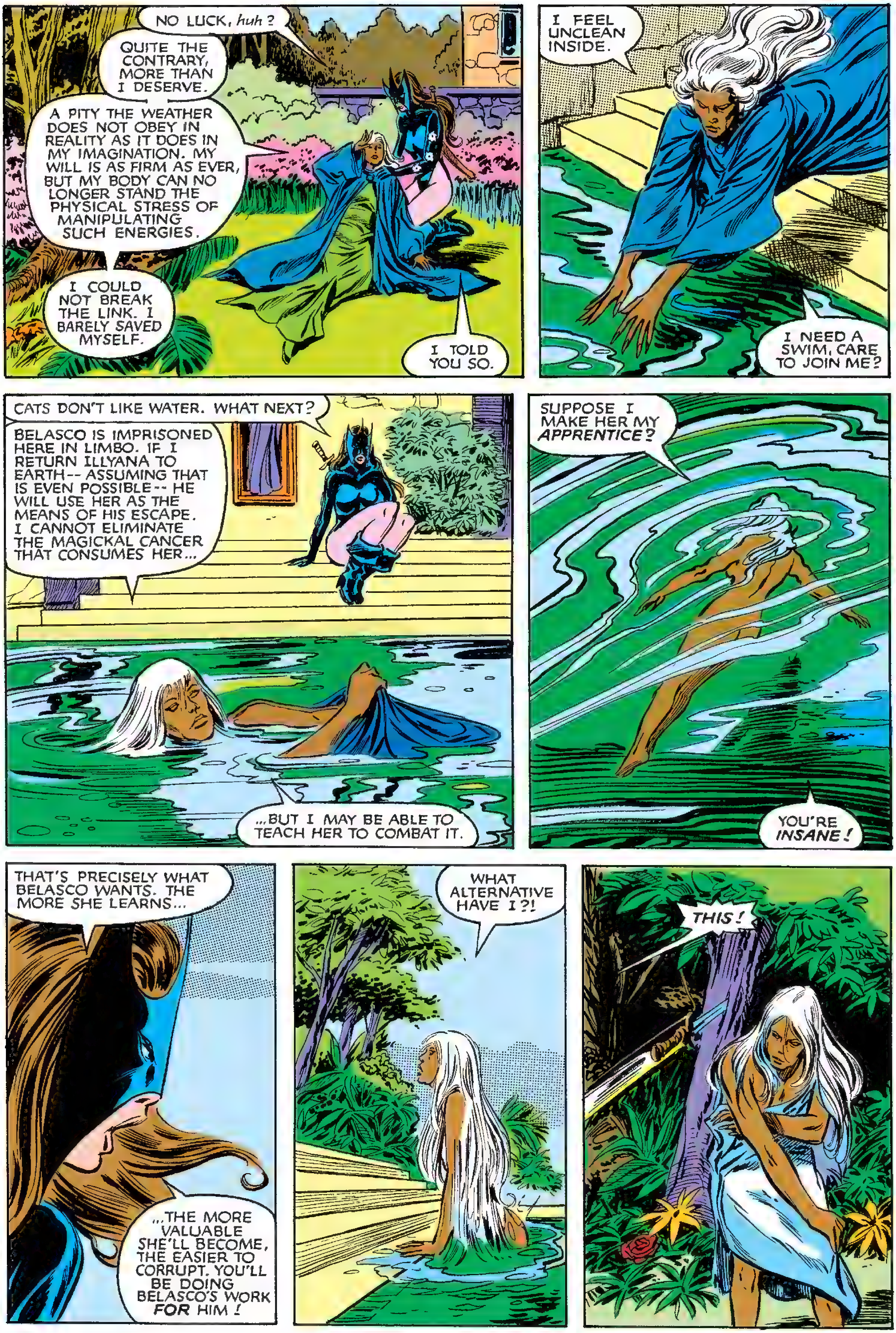

I'M NOT REALLY ASLEEP. I WAS JUST PRETENDING.
I LIKE THIS PLACE BETTER THAN WHERE I WAS BEFORE. IT REMINDS ME OF HOME. I REMEMBER BELASCO AND STORM YELLING, BUT THAT'S ALL-- I WONDER WHAT HAPPENED NEXT?
I FOLLOW THE VOICES. ORORO'S FRIEND SOUNDS SO FAMILIAR -- AND ALL OF A SUDDEN, I KNOW WHO SHE IS!
IT'S KITTY! PETER'S SPECIAL FRIEND-- AND MINE, TOO-- ALL GROWN UP!
I'M REAL QUIET. I DON'T WANT THEM TO KNOW I'M HERE.
UNFORTUNATELY, LITTLE ONE, I AM AWARE OF EVERY LIVING THING IN MY GARDEN.
HOW LIKE A CHILD, THOUGH-- INSATIABLY CURIOUS, BLISSFULLY UNAFRAID, TOTALLY TRUSTING OF THE WORLD AND EVERYTHING IN IT.
YOU WILL SOON LEARN DIFFERENTLY, ILLYANA. AND IT WILL BREAK MY HEART TO HAVE TO TEACH YOU.
CAT--!
ORORO!
I FEAR MY EXERTIONS... HAVE FINALLY... TAKEN THEIR TOLL.
YOU'RE GETTING TOO OLD FOR THIS.
SO BELASCO SAID.
IT ISN'T FUNNY!
PERHAPS NOT, BUT LAUGHTER HELPS ME MAINTAIN MY PERSPECTIVE.
I MUST BREAK BELASCO'S LINK WITH ILLYANA.
IS THAT WISE? IN YOUR CONDITION...
...YOU'RE COURTING DISASTER.

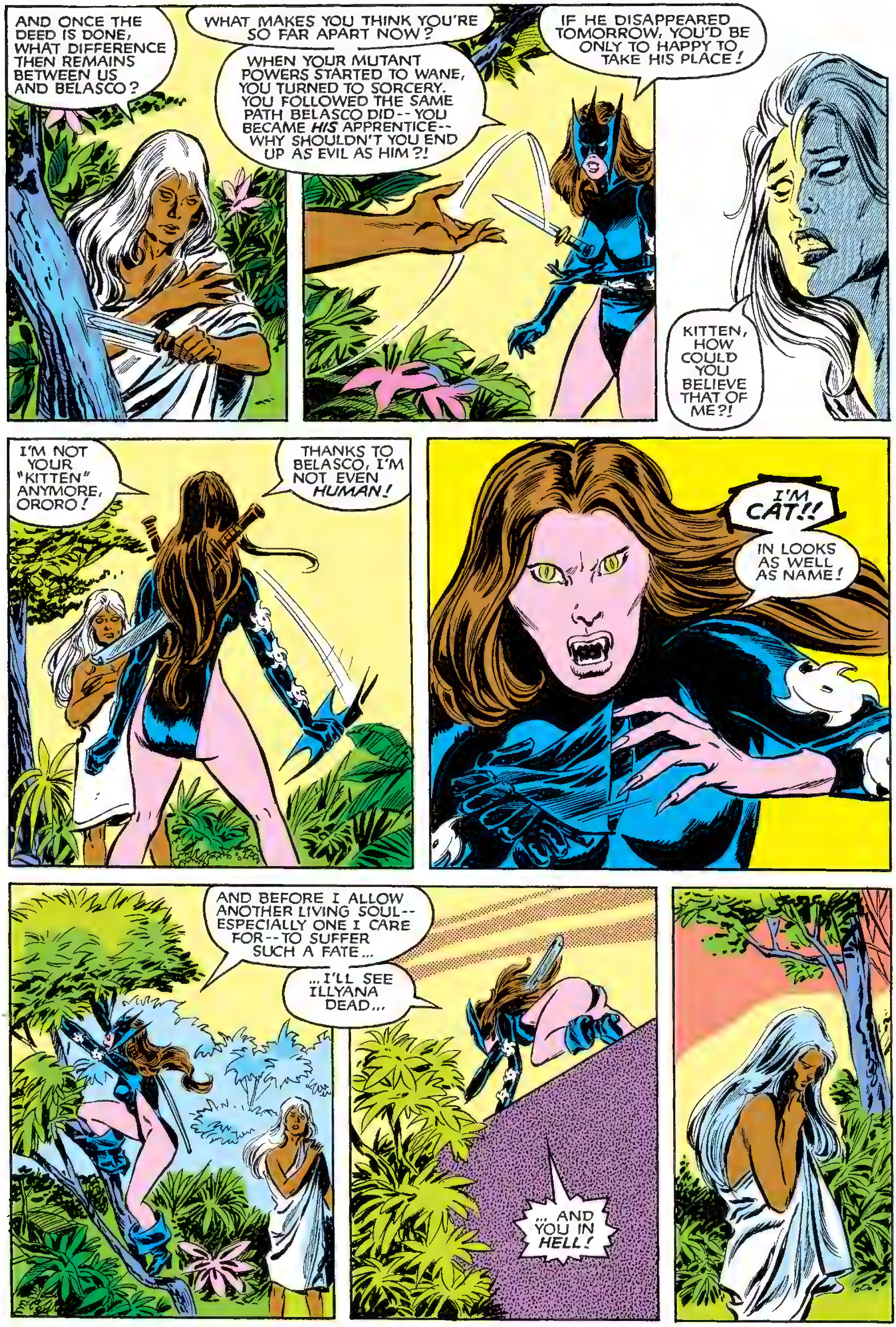

I DARE NOT DELAY. BELASCO IS CORRECT, TIME IS ON HIS SIDE. IT MAY ALREADY BE TOO LATE.
IF SHE'S SO DANGEROUS, THERE'S A SIMPLER SOLUTION.
I HAVE CONSIDERED IT. BUT I HAVE TOO MUCH BLOOD ON MY HANDS ALREADY. I WANT NO MORE.
THEY'RE COMING THIS WAY!
QUICK AS A FLASH, I SCAMPER BACK TO BED AND HIDE UNDER THE COVERS. STORM FINDS ME ANYWAY.
I WANT MY BROTHER, ORORO.
DO NOT FRET. SOON, WITH LUCK...
...YOU SHALL BE BY HIS SIDE ONCE MORE, SAFE AND SOUND.
BELASCO IS EVIL, BEYOND MEASURE, ILLYANA. THE MEDALLION HE GAVE YOU GIVES HIM POWER OVER YOU.
ARE YOU A WITCH? YOU WEREN'T WHEN YOU WERE WITH THE X-MEN.
I WAS MUCH YOUNGER THEN.
IF I AM ABLE TO FREE YOU FROM BELASCO'S ENCHANTMENT, I SHALL THEN BE ABLE TO SEND YOU HOME.
Oh, THANK YOU, ORORO-- THANK YOU!
WILL YOU AND KITTY BE COMING WITH ME?!
NO!
I-- I'M SORRY, KITTY. I DIDN'T MEAN TO MAKE YOU ANGRY.
KITTY'S DEAD, ILLYANA!
FORGET HER!
THIS IS WHERE WE BELONG, CHILD.
I AM BEGINNING MY SPELL. DO NOT BE AFRAID.
I'M NOT. I KNOW YOU'D NEVER HURT ME.
THE LOOK IN STORM'S EYES REMINDS ME OF MY MOTHER, BUT SHE'S SO SAD.

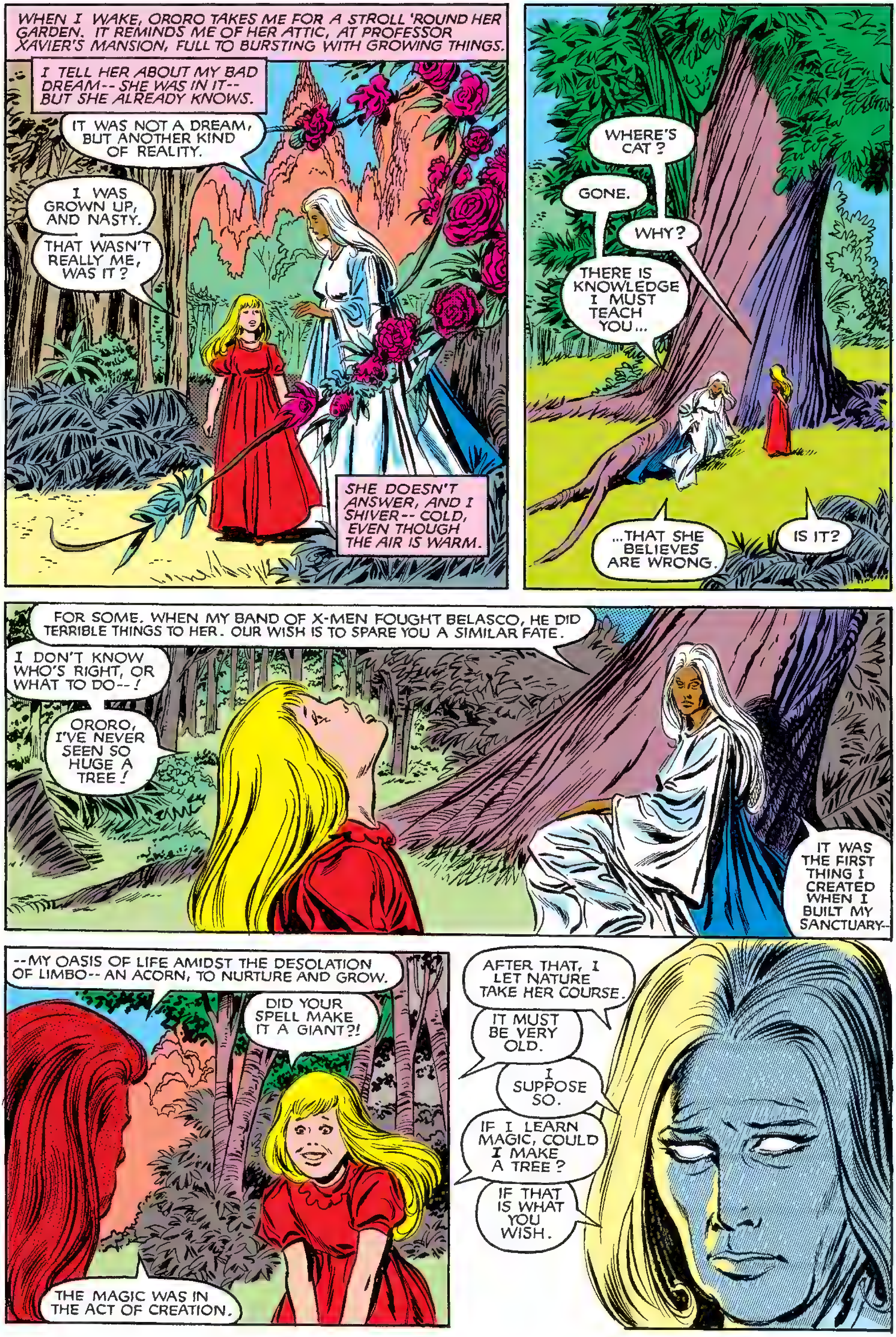

HER TOUCH MAKES ME FEEL TINGLY ALL OVER.
THE TRANSITION IS COMPLETE...
...AND EASIER THAN I ANTICIPATED.
I HAVE SEPARATED MY ASTRAL SELF FROM MY CORPOREAL FORM AND CAST IT INTO ILLYANA'S MIND. THIS MYSTIC PATH SHOULD LEAD ME TO THE PSYCHIC JUNCTION FORMED BY THE MEDALLION.
I HAD FORGOTTEN SUCH BEAUTY AND JOY EXISTED.
I WAS LIKE THIS ONCE-- OR SO I TELL MYSELF. IT HAS BEEN SO LONG, I AM NO LONGER CERTAIN. PERHAPS IT IS A LIE...
...I USE TO EASE MY AWARENESS OF HOW MY SOUL NOW APPEARS.
THERE-- MY DESTINATION-- THE CORE OF ILLYANA'S BEING.
BRIGHT LADY HAVE MERCY.
COULD SHE HAVE BECOME SO TRANSFORMED IN SO SHORT A TIME?!
YOU BETTER BELIEVE IT, 'RORO.
ILLYANA?!?
GIVE THE LADY A GOLD STAR! CUTE, huh? CONSIDER IT A PREVIEW OF WHAT I'LL BE ONCE BELASCO'S HAD HIS WILD, WICKED WAY WITH ME.
I CAN HARDLY WAIT.
THIS IS MY DOMAIN, STORM. YOU ENTER AT YOUR OWN RISK.

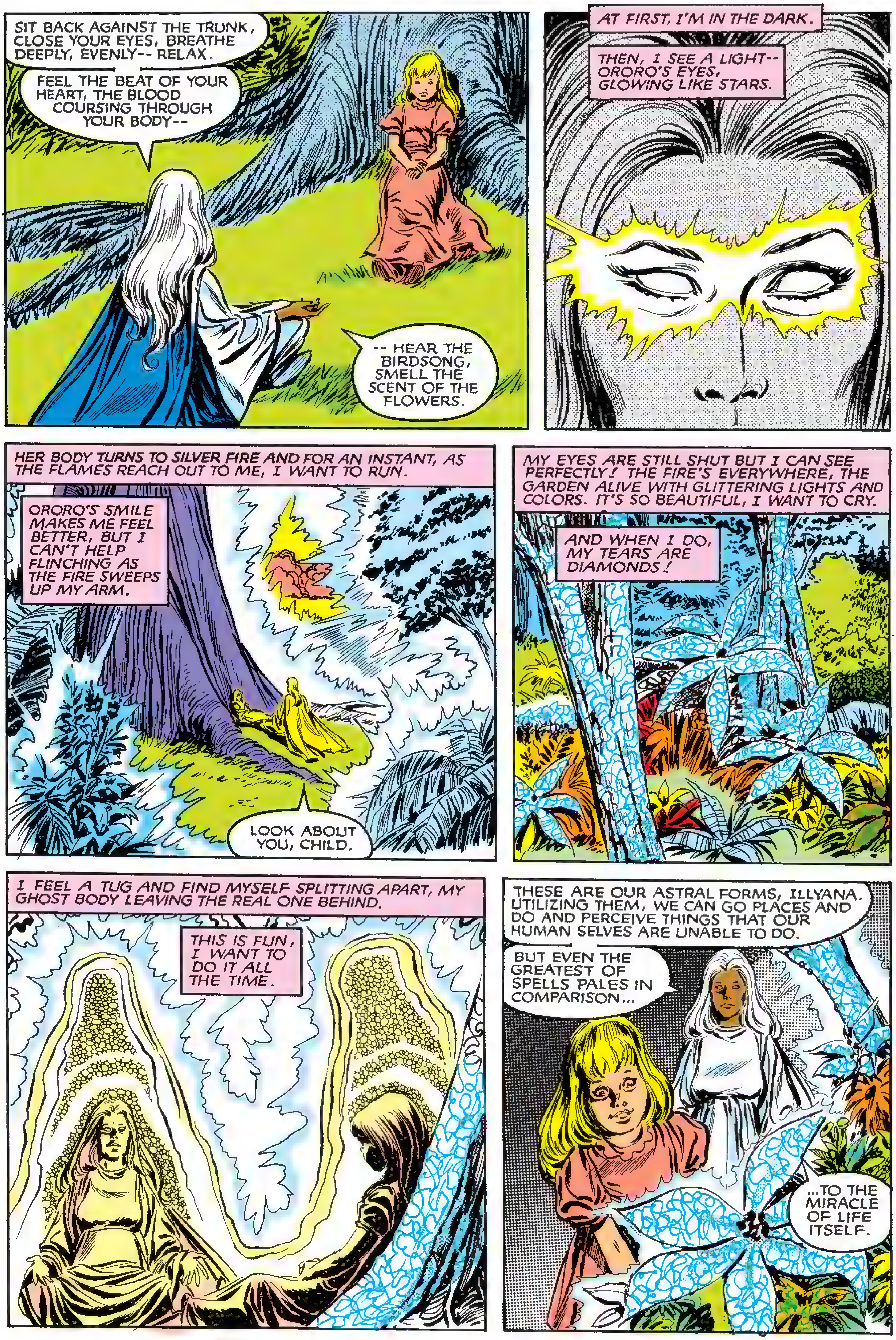

THAT, CHANGELING, REMAINS TO BE SEEN.
NICE MOVE.
HOW'S THIS FOR A RESPONSE?
HER WHIP--ATTACKING OF ITS OWN VOLITION, AS IF IT IS ALIVE, A PART OF ILLYANA!
CHOKING ME--BARBS TEARING AT MY THROAT! IF MY ASTRAL FORM IS SLAIN...
...MY BODY DIES AS WELL.
FORTUNATELY, I HAVE A FEW TRICKS LEFT.
THE WHIP CAN KILL. FLOWERS CANNOT.
I UNDERESTIMATED BELASCO. HIS BLOODSTONE GIVES ILLYANA'S CORRUPTED PERSONA SORCEROUS POWER EQUAL TO MINE.
WERE YOU FRESH AND HEALTHY --AND YOUNG--
--THIS MIGHT BE A FAIR FIGHT.
DEMONS!
MY SPELLS HAVE NO EFFECT. I CANNOT BREAK THEIR GRIP!

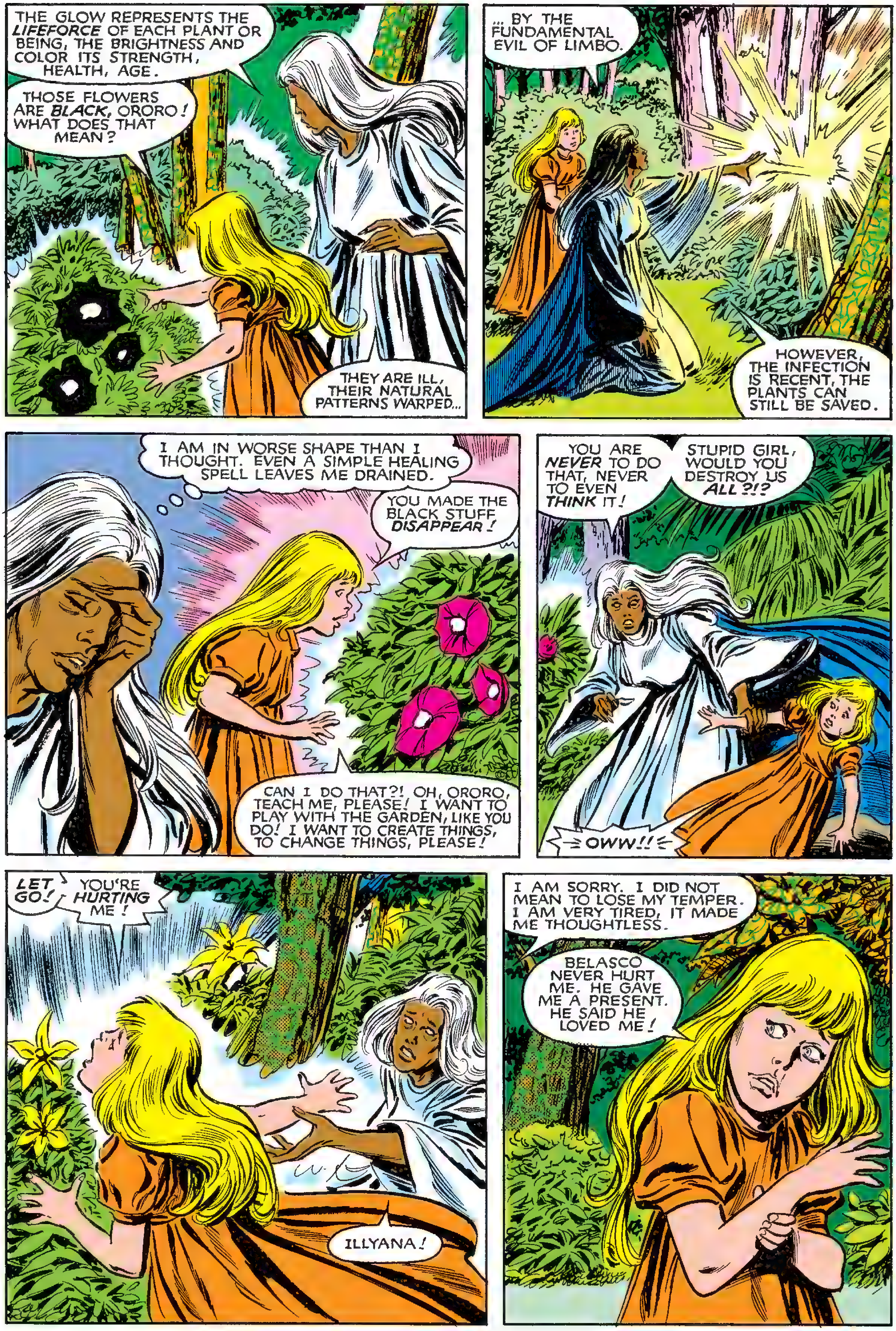

HOW FRAIL LIFE IS.
A SNAPPED SPINE, A CRUSHED NECK, A KNIFE IN THE HEART-- SO MANY WAYS TO END IT, AND SO EASILY. I CAN HURT YOU, ORORO, I CAN KILL YOU.
BUT I'D RATHER NOT.
WE'RE KINDRED SPIRITS, YOU AND I, TOUCHED BY BELASCO'S DARKLING MAJESTY. WHY HIDE YOUR TRUE SELF...
...WHEN IT'S SO BEAUTIFUL?
MONSTER, I **DENY** YOU AS I DENIED YOUR **MAKER!**
I WAS BORN A **MUTANT** LONG BEFORE I TURNED TO MAGIC, AND THE ELEMENTS OF NATURE ARE STILL MINE TO **COMMAND!**
A WIND!
A **TEMPEST,** ILLYANA!
FUELED BY THE RAGE AND HATRED IN *MY* SOUL!
YOU WON'T KILL ME-- YOU WOULDN'T DARE-- FOR FEAR OF WHAT IT WILL MEAN TO ILLYANA!
IF YOU BELIEVE THAT...
...YOU HAVE MUCH TO LEARN.

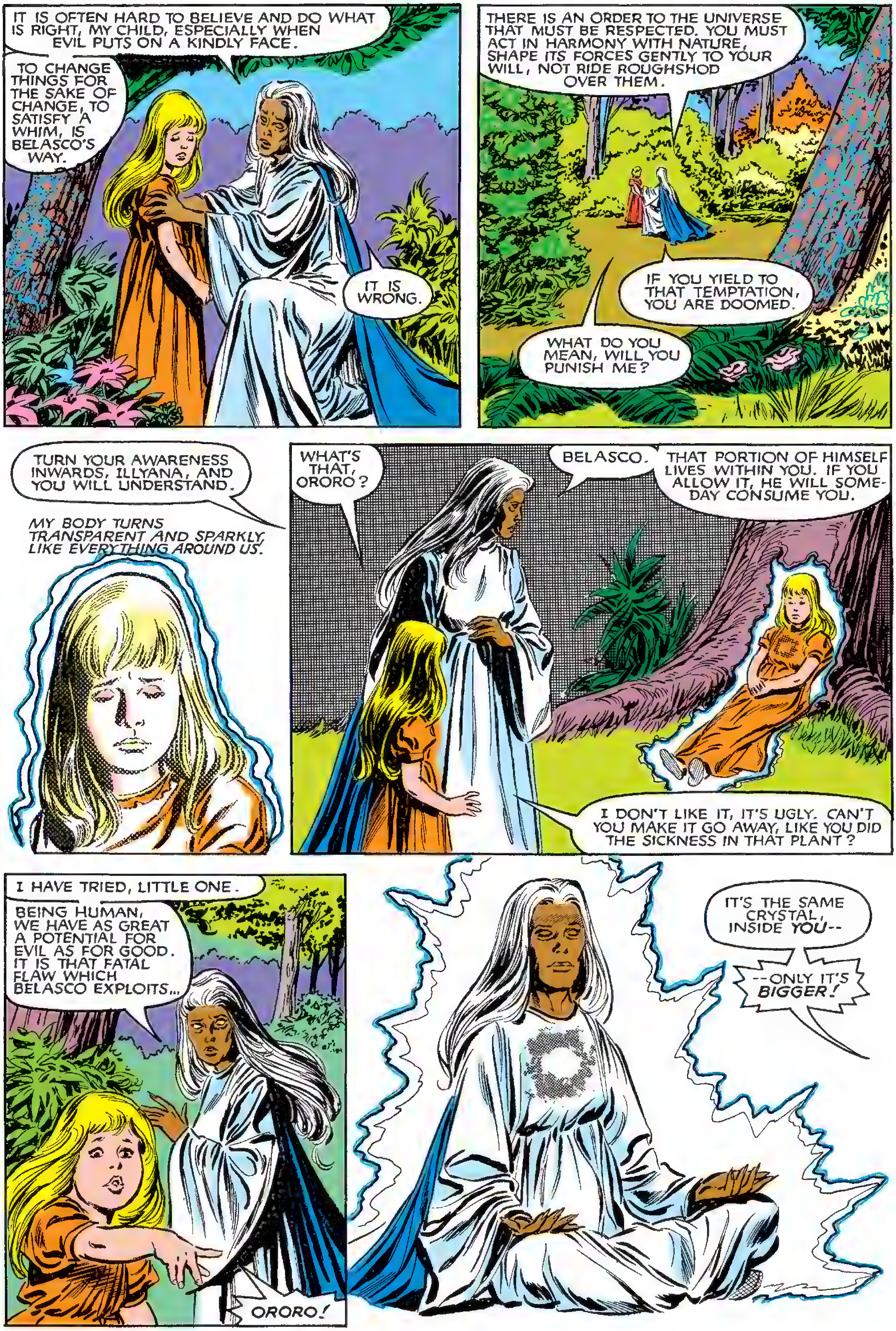

NO LUCK, *huh*?
QUITE THE CONTRARY, MORE THAN I DESERVE.
A PITY THE WEATHER DOES NOT OBEY IN REALITY AS IT DOES IN MY IMAGINATION. MY WILL IS AS FIRM AS EVER, BUT MY BODY CAN NO LONGER STAND THE PHYSICAL STRESS OF MANIPULATING SUCH ENERGIES.
I COULD NOT BREAK THE LINK. I BARELY SAVED MYSELF.
I TOLD YOU SO.
I FEEL UNCLEAN INSIDE.
I NEED A SWIM. CARE TO JOIN ME?
CATS DON'T LIKE WATER. WHAT NEXT?
BELASCO IS IMPRISONED HERE IN LIMBO. IF I RETURN ILLYANA TO EARTH-- ASSUMING THAT IS EVEN POSSIBLE-- HE WILL USE HER AS THE MEANS OF HIS ESCAPE. I CANNOT ELIMINATE THE MAGICKAL CANCER THAT CONSUMES HER...
...BUT I MAY BE ABLE TO TEACH HER TO COMBAT IT.
SUPPOSE I MAKE HER MY *APPRENTICE*?
YOU'RE *INSANE!*
THAT'S PRECISELY WHAT BELASCO WANTS. THE MORE SHE LEARNS...
...THE MORE VALUABLE SHE'LL BECOME, THE EASIER TO CORRUPT. YOU'LL BE DOING BELASCO'S WORK *FOR* HIM!
WHAT ALTERNATIVE HAVE I?!
THIS!

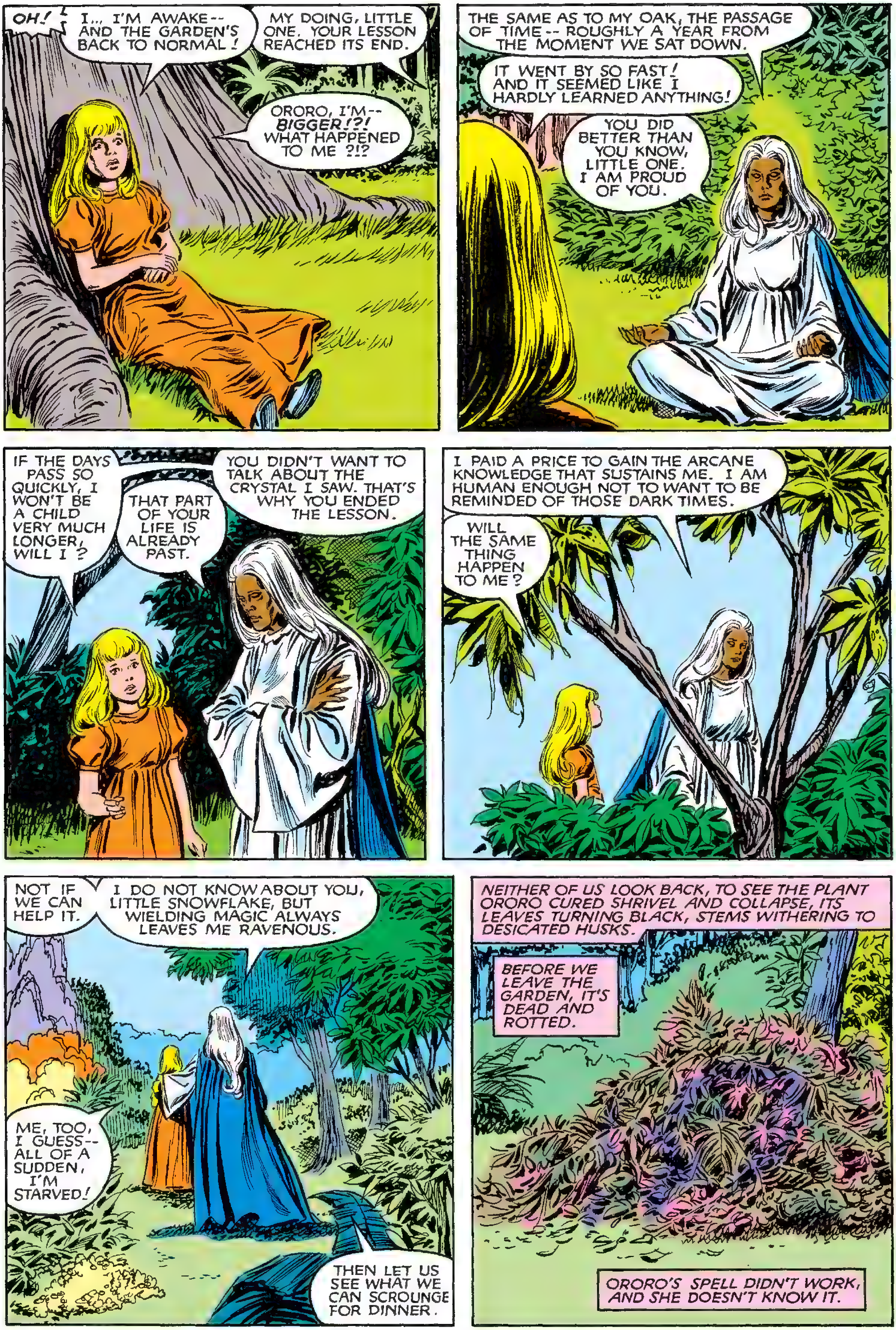

AND ONCE THE DEED IS DONE, WHAT DIFFERENCE THEN REMAINS BETWEEN US AND BELASCO?
WHAT MAKES YOU THINK YOU'RE SO FAR APART NOW?
WHEN YOUR MUTANT POWERS STARTED TO WANE, YOU TURNED TO SORCERY. YOU FOLLOWED THE SAME PATH BELASCO DID-- YOU BECAME *HIS* APPRENTICE-- WHY SHOULDN'T YOU END UP AS EVIL AS HIM?!
IF HE DISAPPEARED TOMORROW, YOU'D BE ONLY TO HAPPY TO TAKE HIS PLACE!
KITTEN, HOW COULD YOU BELIEVE THAT OF ME?!
I'M NOT YOUR "KITTEN" ANYMORE, ORORO!
THANKS TO BELASCO, I'M NOT EVEN *HUMAN!*
I'M CAT!!
IN LOOKS AS WELL AS NAME!
AND BEFORE I ALLOW ANOTHER LIVING SOUL-- ESPECIALLY ONE I CARE FOR--TO SUFFER SUCH A FATE...
...I'LL SEE ILLYANA DEAD...
..., AND YOU IN HELL!

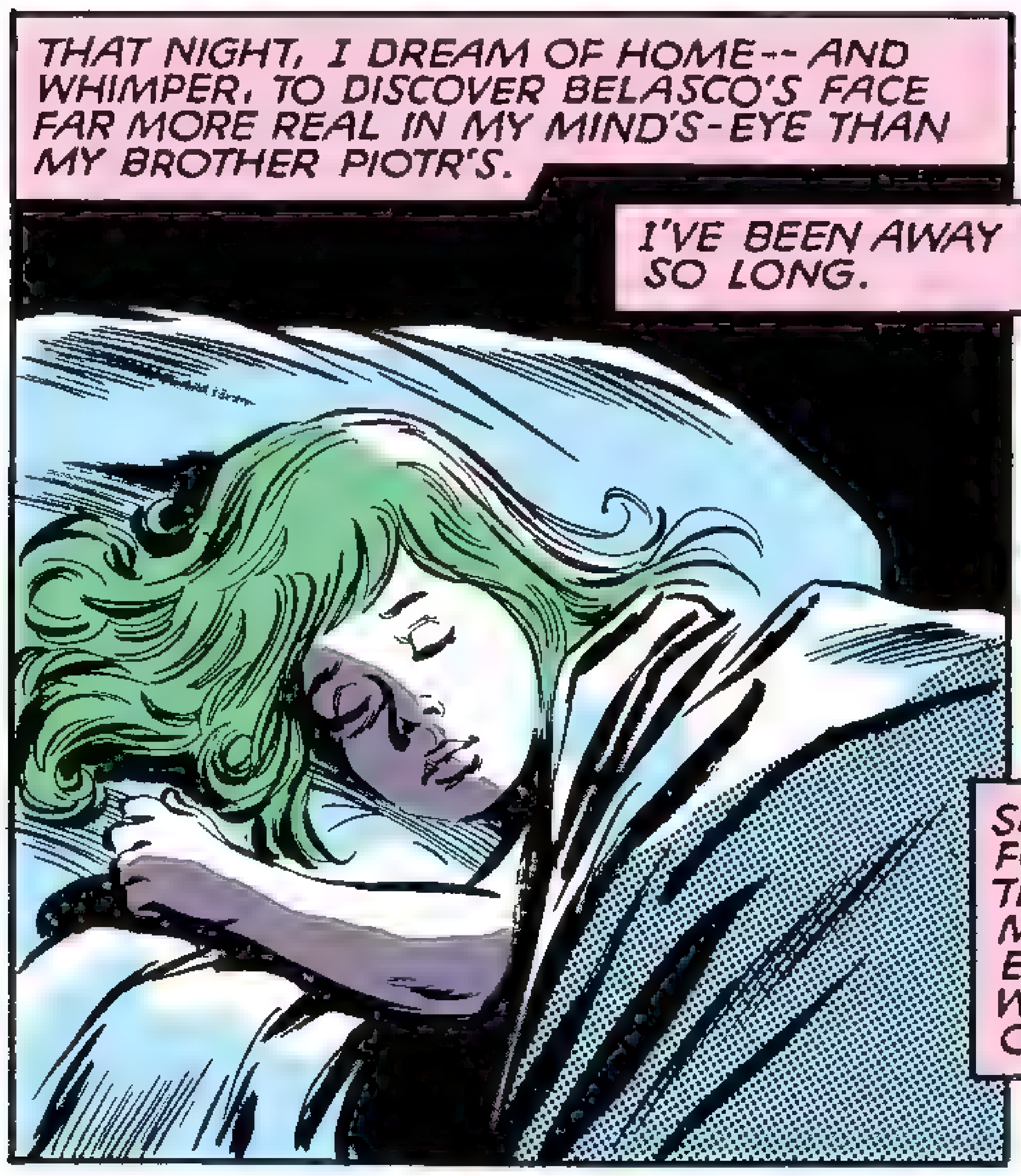

WHEN I WAKE, ORORO TAKES ME FOR A STROLL 'ROUND HER GARDEN. IT REMINDS ME OF HER ATTIC, AT PROFESSOR XAVIER'S MANSION, FULL TO BURSTING WITH GROWING THINGS.
I TELL HER ABOUT MY BAD DREAM-- SHE WAS IN IT-- BUT SHE ALREADY KNOWS.
IT WAS NOT A DREAM, BUT ANOTHER KIND OF REALITY.
I WAS GROWN UP, AND NASTY.
THAT WASN'T REALLY ME, WAS IT?
SHE DOESN'T ANSWER, AND I SHIVER-- COLD, EVEN THOUGH THE AIR IS WARM.
WHERE'S CAT?
GONE.
WHY?
THERE IS KNOWLEDGE I MUST TEACH YOU...
...THAT SHE BELIEVES ARE WRONG.
IS IT?
FOR SOME. WHEN MY BAND OF X-MEN FOUGHT BELASCO, HE DID TERRIBLE THINGS TO HER. OUR WISH IS TO SPARE YOU A SIMILAR FATE.
I DON'T KNOW WHO'S RIGHT, OR WHAT TO DO--!
ORORO, I'VE NEVER SEEN SO HUGE A TREE!
IT WAS THE FIRST THING I CREATED WHEN I BUILT MY SANCTUARY--
--MY OASIS OF LIFE AMIDST THE DESOLATION OF LIMBO-- AN ACORN, TO NURTURE AND GROW.
DID YOUR SPELL MAKE IT A GIANT?!
THE MAGIC WAS IN THE ACT OF CREATION.
AFTER THAT, I LET NATURE TAKE HER COURSE.
IT MUST BE VERY OLD.
I SUPPOSE SO.
IF I LEARN MAGIC, COULD I MAKE A TREE?
IF THAT IS WHAT YOU WISH.

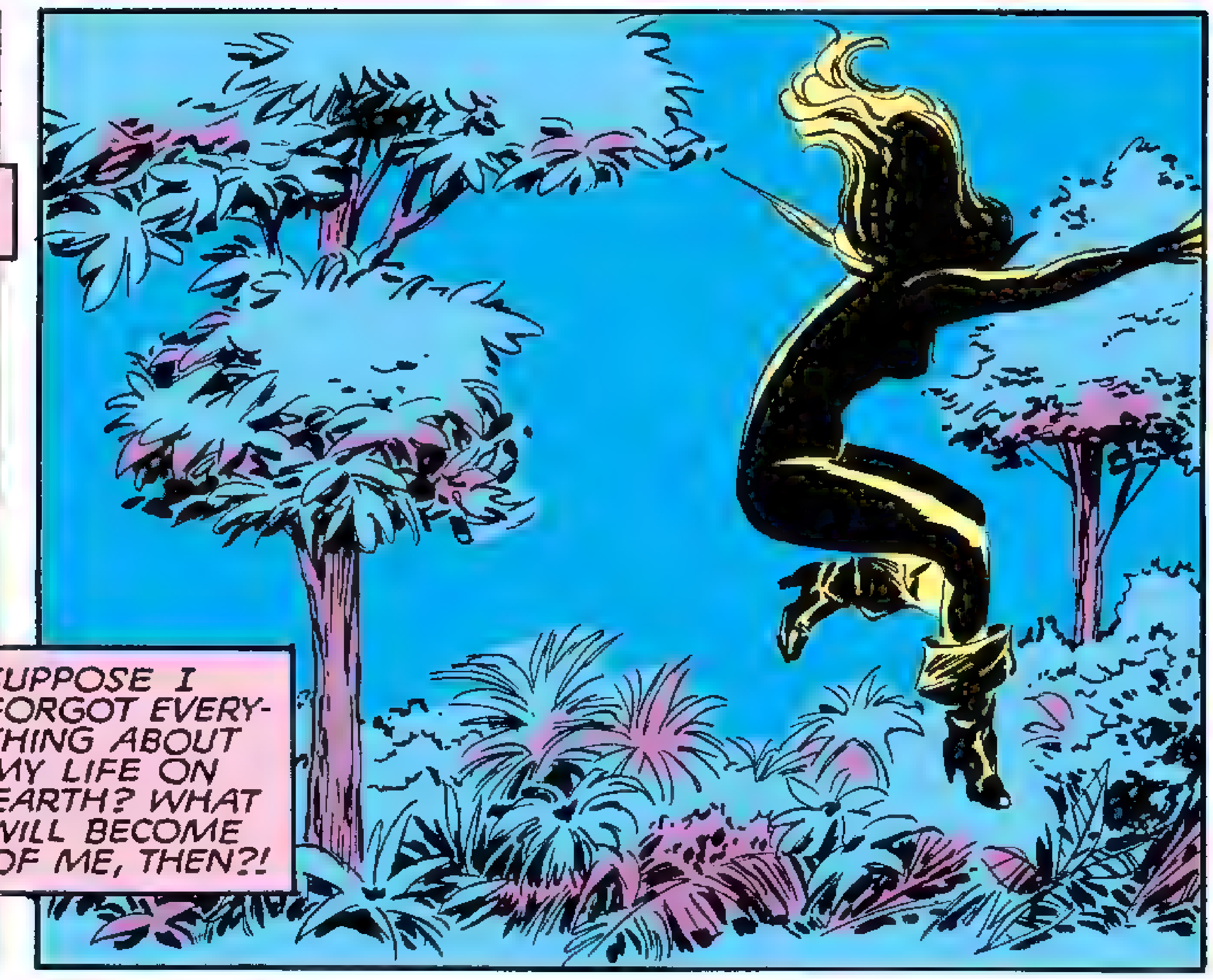

SIT BACK AGAINST THE TRUNK, CLOSE YOUR EYES, BREATHE DEEPLY, EVENLY-- RELAX.
FEEL THE BEAT OF YOUR HEART, THE BLOOD COURSING THROUGH YOUR BODY--
-- HEAR THE BIRDSONG, SMELL THE SCENT OF THE FLOWERS.
AT FIRST, I'M IN THE DARK.
THEN, I SEE A LIGHT-- ORORO'S EYES, GLOWING LIKE STARS.
HER BODY TURNS TO SILVER FIRE AND FOR AN INSTANT, AS THE FLAMES REACH OUT TO ME, I WANT TO RUN.
ORORO'S SMILE MAKES ME FEEL BETTER, BUT I CAN'T HELP FLINCHING AS THE FIRE SWEEPS UP MY ARM.
LOOK ABOUT YOU, CHILD.
MY EYES ARE STILL SHUT BUT I CAN SEE PERFECTLY! THE FIRE'S EVERYWHERE, THE GARDEN ALIVE WITH GLITTERING LIGHTS AND COLORS. IT'S SO BEAUTIFUL, I WANT TO CRY.
AND WHEN I DO, MY TEARS ARE DIAMONDS!
I FEEL A TUG AND FIND MYSELF SPLITTING APART, MY GHOST BODY LEAVING THE REAL ONE BEHIND.
THIS IS FUN, I WANT TO DO IT ALL THE TIME.
THESE ARE OUR ASTRAL FORMS, ILLYANA. UTILIZING THEM, WE CAN GO PLACES AND DO AND PERCEIVE THINGS THAT OUR HUMAN SELVES ARE UNABLE TO DO.
BUT EVEN THE GREATEST OF SPELLS PALES IN COMPARISON...
...TO THE MIRACLE OF LIFE ITSELF.

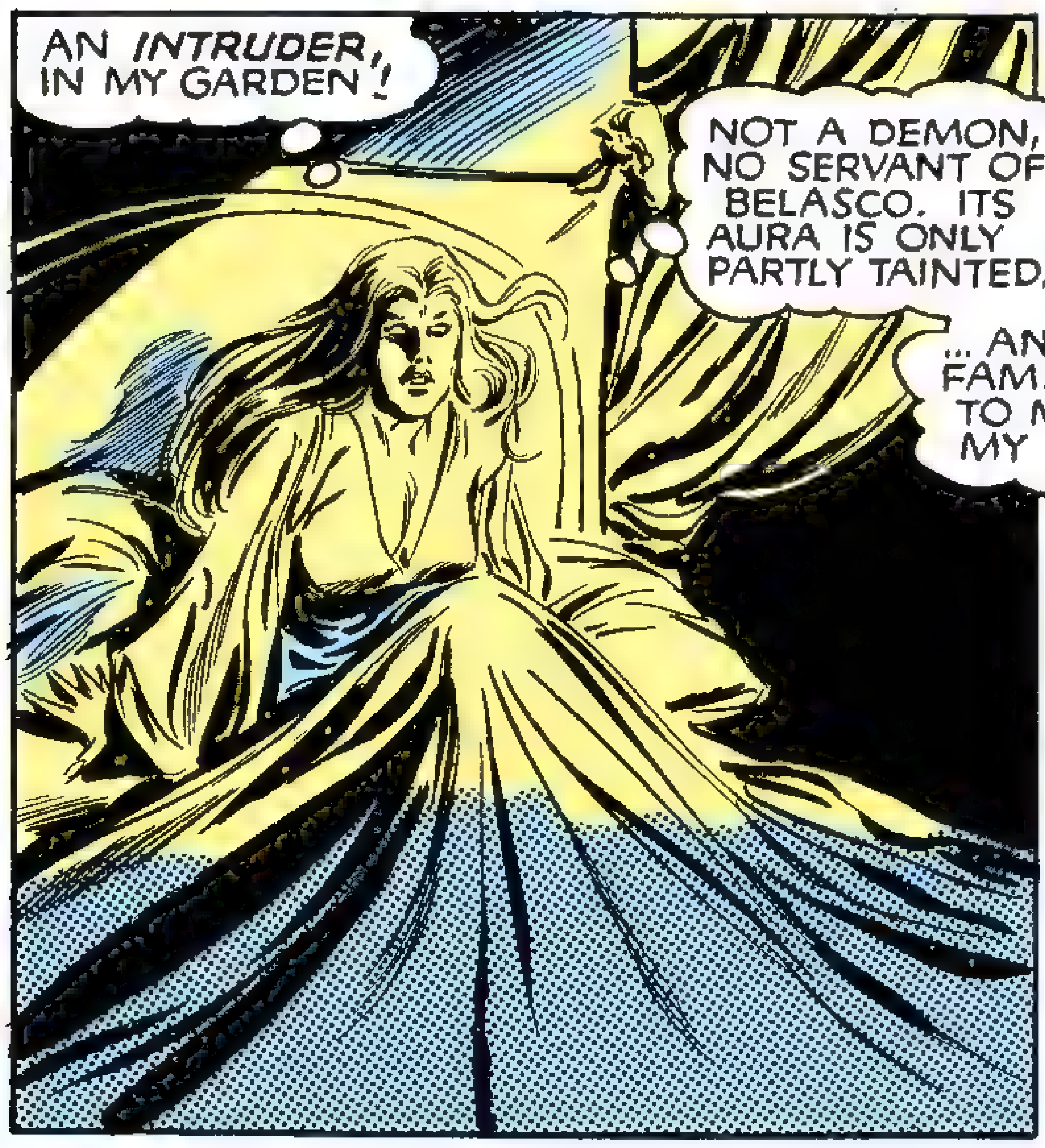

THE GLOW REPRESENTS THE *LIFEFORCE* OF EACH PLANT OR BEING, THE BRIGHTNESS AND COLOR ITS STRENGTH, HEALTH, AGE.
THOSE FLOWERS ARE *BLACK,* ORORO! WHAT DOES THAT MEAN?
THEY ARE ILL, THEIR NATURAL PATTERNS WARPED...
... BY THE FUNDAMENTAL EVIL OF LIMBO.
HOWEVER, THE INFECTION IS RECENT, THE PLANTS CAN STILL BE SAVED.
I AM IN WORSE SHAPE THAN I THOUGHT. EVEN A SIMPLE HEALING SPELL LEAVES ME DRAINED.
YOU MADE THE BLACK STUFF *DISAPPEAR!*
CAN I DO THAT?! OH, ORORO, TEACH ME, PLEASE! I WANT TO PLAY WITH THE GARDEN, LIKE YOU DO! I WANT TO CREATE THINGS, TO CHANGE THINGS, PLEASE!
YOU ARE *NEVER* TO DO THAT, NEVER TO EVEN *THINK* IT!
STUPID GIRL, WOULD YOU DESTROY US *ALL?!?*
OWW!!
LET GO!
YOU'RE *HURTING* ME!
ILLYANA!
I AM SORRY. I DID NOT MEAN TO LOSE MY TEMPER. I AM VERY TIRED, IT MADE ME THOUGHTLESS.
BELASCO NEVER HURT ME. HE GAVE ME A PRESENT. HE SAID HE LOVED ME!

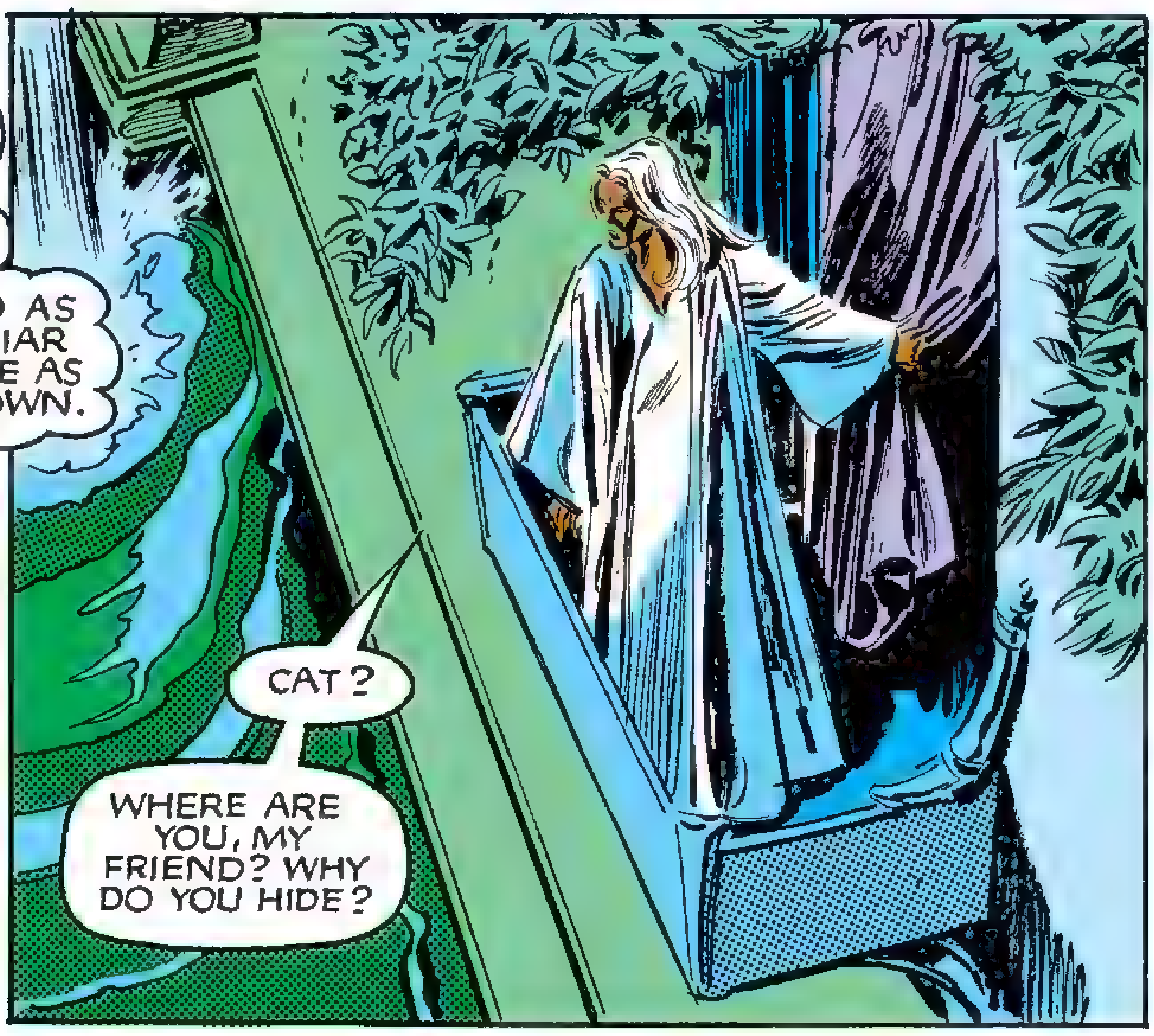

IT IS OFTEN HARD TO BELIEVE AND DO WHAT IS RIGHT, MY CHILD, ESPECIALLY WHEN EVIL PUTS ON A KINDLY FACE.
TO CHANGE THINGS FOR THE SAKE OF CHANGE, TO SATISFY A WHIM, IS BELASCO'S WAY.
IT IS WRONG.
THERE IS AN ORDER TO THE UNIVERSE THAT MUST BE RESPECTED. YOU MUST ACT IN HARMONY WITH NATURE, SHAPE ITS FORCES GENTLY TO YOUR WILL, NOT RIDE ROUGHSHOD OVER THEM.
IF YOU YIELD TO THAT TEMPTATION, YOU ARE DOOMED.
WHAT DO YOU MEAN, WILL YOU PUNISH ME?
TURN YOUR AWARENESS INWARDS, ILLYANA, AND YOU WILL UNDERSTAND.
MY BODY TURNS TRANSPARENT AND SPARKLY, LIKE EVERYTHING AROUND US.
WHAT'S THAT, ORORO?
BELASCO.
THAT PORTION OF HIMSELF LIVES WITHIN YOU. IF YOU ALLOW IT, HE WILL SOMEDAY CONSUME YOU.
I DON'T LIKE IT, IT'S UGLY. CAN'T YOU MAKE IT GO AWAY, LIKE YOU DID THE SICKNESS IN THAT PLANT?
I HAVE TRIED, LITTLE ONE.
BEING HUMAN, WE HAVE AS GREAT A POTENTIAL FOR EVIL AS FOR GOOD. IT IS THAT FATAL FLAW WHICH BELASCO EXPLOITS...
ORORO!
IT'S THE SAME CRYSTAL, INSIDE *YOU*--
--ONLY IT'S *BIGGER!*

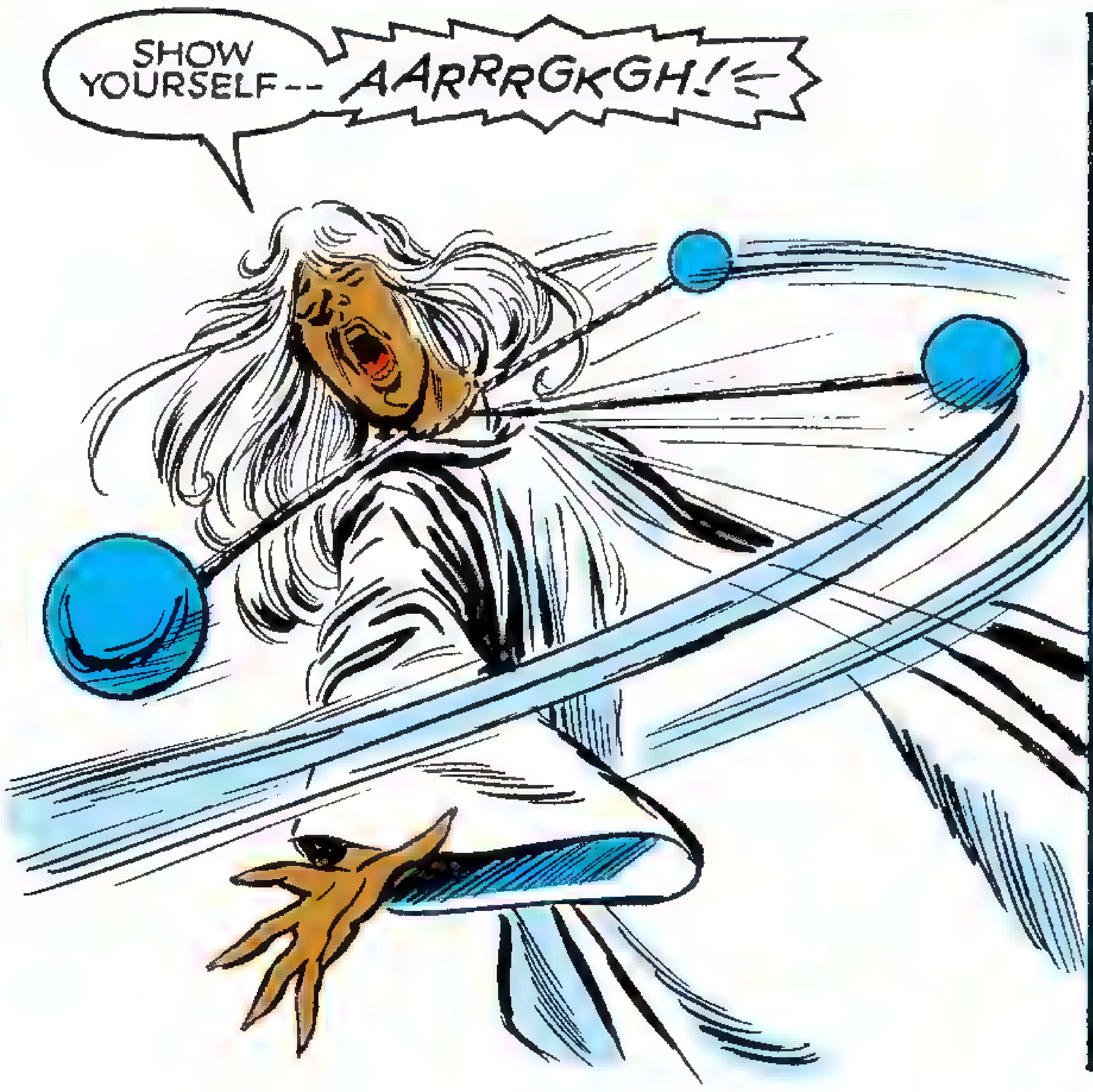

OH!
I... I'M AWAKE -- AND THE GARDEN'S BACK TO NORMAL!
MY DOING, LITTLE ONE. YOUR LESSON REACHED ITS END.
ORORO, I'M -- *BIGGER!?!* WHAT HAPPENED TO ME ?!?
THE SAME AS TO MY OAK, THE PASSAGE OF TIME -- ROUGHLY A YEAR FROM THE MOMENT WE SAT DOWN.
IT WENT BY SO FAST! AND IT SEEMED LIKE I HARDLY LEARNED ANYTHING!
YOU DID BETTER THAN YOU KNOW, LITTLE ONE. I AM PROUD OF YOU.
IF THE DAYS PASS SO QUICKLY, I WON'T BE A CHILD VERY MUCH LONGER, WILL I ?
THAT PART OF YOUR LIFE IS ALREADY PAST.
YOU DIDN'T WANT TO TALK ABOUT THE CRYSTAL I SAW. THAT'S WHY YOU ENDED THE LESSON.
I PAID A PRICE TO GAIN THE ARCANE KNOWLEDGE THAT SUSTAINS ME. I AM HUMAN ENOUGH NOT TO WANT TO BE REMINDED OF THOSE DARK TIMES.
WILL THE SAME THING HAPPEN TO ME ?
NOT IF WE CAN HELP IT.
I DO NOT KNOW ABOUT YOU, LITTLE SNOWFLAKE, BUT WIELDING MAGIC ALWAYS LEAVES ME RAVENOUS.
ME, TOO, I GUESS -- ALL OF A SUDDEN, I'M STARVED!
THEN LET US SEE WHAT WE CAN SCROUNGE FOR DINNER.
NEITHER OF US LOOK BACK, TO SEE THE PLANT ORORO CURED SHRIVEL AND COLLAPSE, ITS LEAVES TURNING BLACK, STEMS WITHERING TO DESICATED HUSKS.
BEFORE WE LEAVE THE GARDEN, IT'S DEAD AND ROTTED.
ORORO'S SPELL DIDN'T WORK, AND SHE DOESN'T KNOW IT.

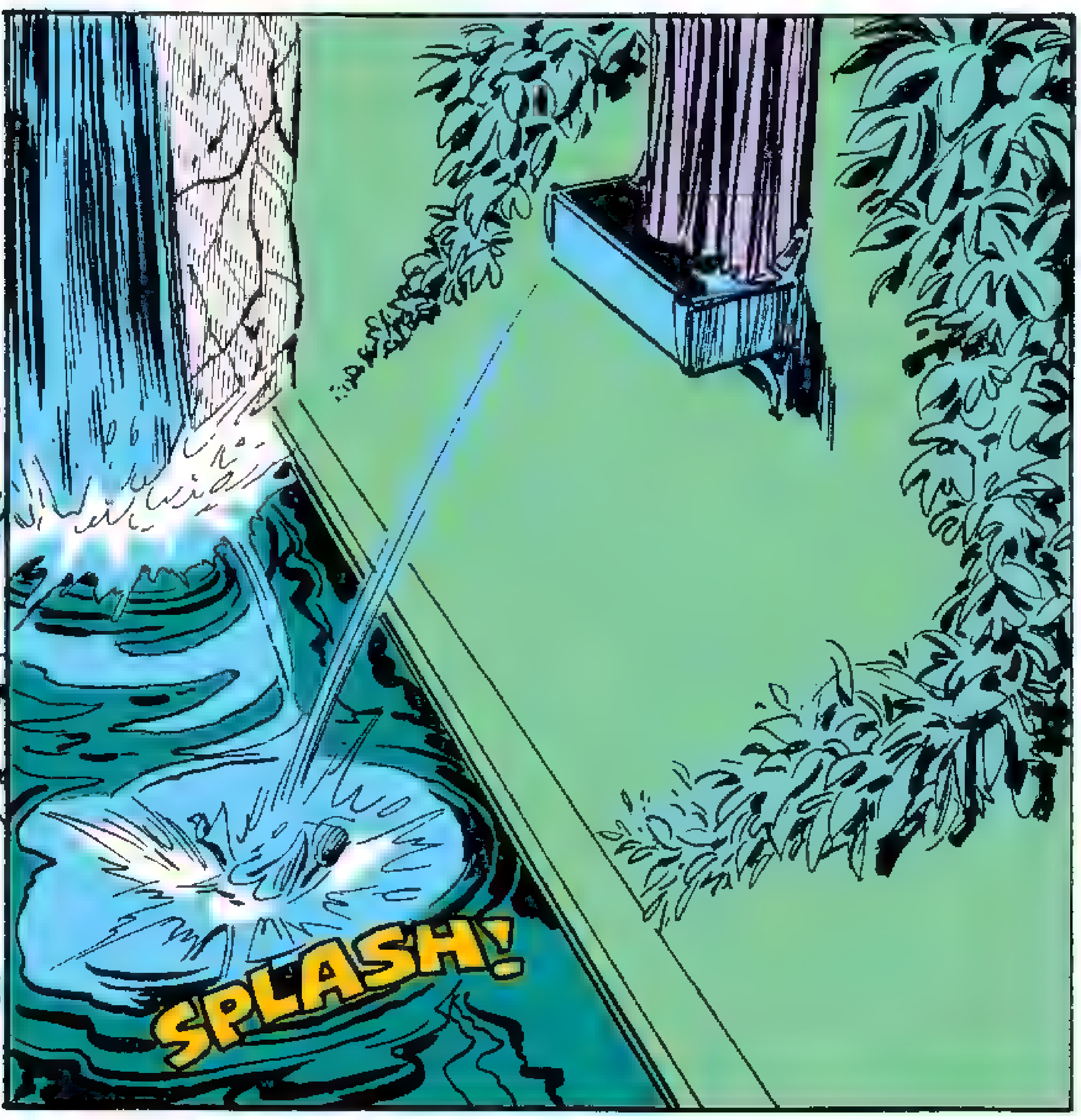

THAT NIGHT, I DREAM OF HOME-- AND WHIMPER, TO DISCOVER BELASCO'S FACE FAR MORE REAL IN MY MIND'S-EYE THAN MY BROTHER PIOTR'S.
I'VE BEEN AWAY SO LONG.

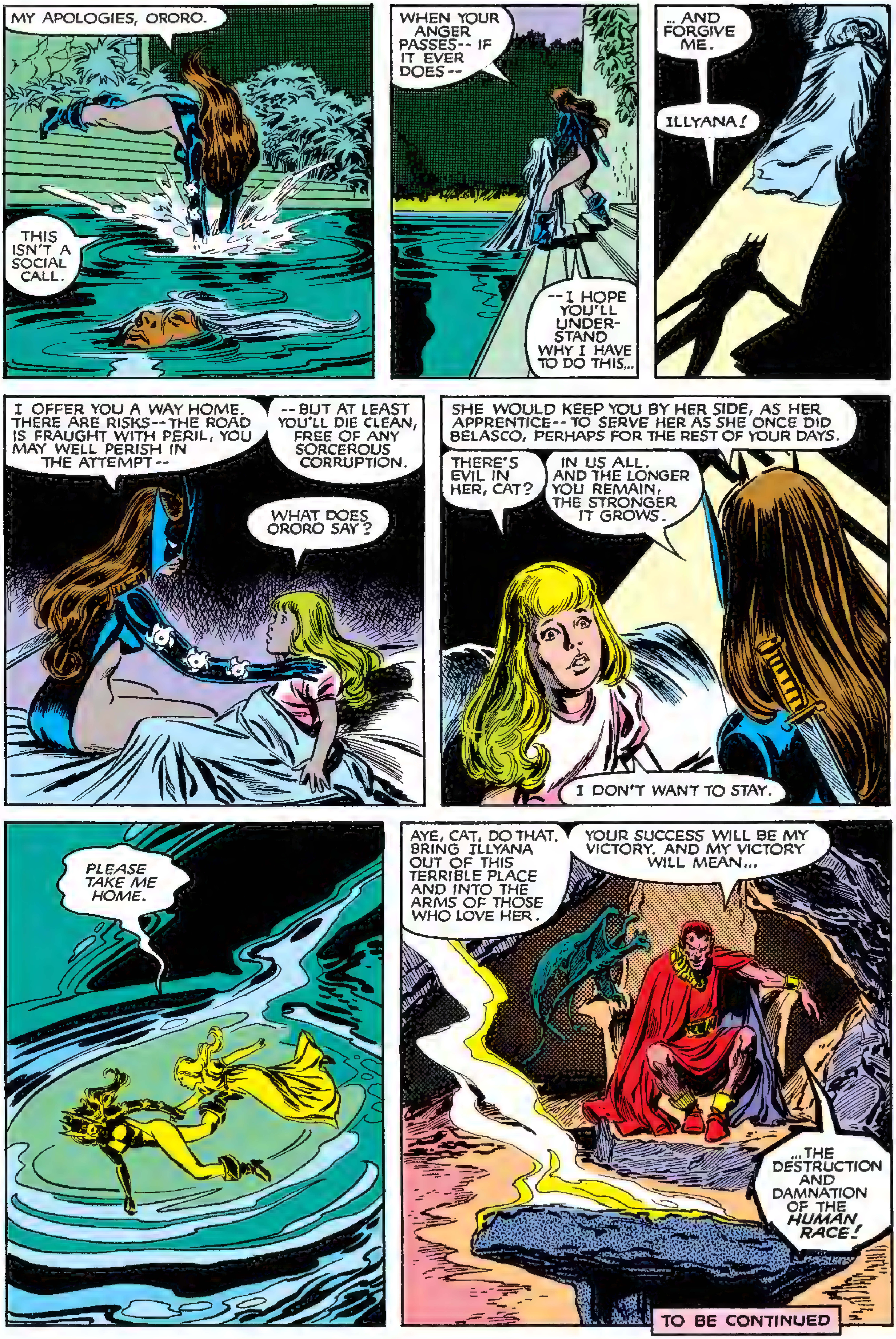

SUPPOSE I FORGOT EVERYTHING ABOUT MY LIFE ON EARTH? WHAT WILL BECOME OF ME, THEN?!


AN INTRUDER, IN MY GARDEN!
NOT A DEMON, NO SERVANT OF BELASCO. ITS AURA IS ONLY PARTLY TAINTED...
...AND AS FAMILIAR TO ME AS MY OWN.


CAT?
WHERE ARE YOU, MY FRIEND? WHY DO YOU HIDE?


SHOW YOURSELF--
AARRRGKGH!


SPLASH!


MY APOLOGIES, ORORO.
THIS ISN'T A SOCIAL CALL.
WHEN YOUR ANGER PASSES-- IF IT EVER DOES--
--I HOPE YOU'LL UNDERSTAND WHY I HAVE TO DO THIS...
... AND FORGIVE ME.
ILLYANA!
I OFFER YOU A WAY HOME. THERE ARE RISKS--THE ROAD IS FRAUGHT WITH PERIL, YOU MAY WELL PERISH IN THE ATTEMPT--
--BUT AT LEAST YOU'LL DIE CLEAN, FREE OF ANY SORCEROUS CORRUPTION.
WHAT DOES ORORO SAY?
SHE WOULD KEEP YOU BY HER SIDE, AS HER APPRENTICE--TO SERVE HER AS SHE ONCE DID BELASCO, PERHAPS FOR THE REST OF YOUR DAYS.
THERE'S EVIL IN HER, CAT?
IN US ALL. AND THE LONGER YOU REMAIN, THE STRONGER IT GROWS.
I DON'T WANT TO STAY.
PLEASE TAKE ME HOME.
AYE, CAT, DO THAT. BRING ILLYANA OUT OF THIS TERRIBLE PLACE AND INTO THE ARMS OF THOSE WHO LOVE HER.
YOUR SUCCESS WILL BE MY VICTORY. AND MY VICTORY WILL MEAN...
...THE DESTRUCTION AND DAMNATION OF THE HUMAN RACE!
TO BE CONTINUED

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Stan Lee PRESENTS:
COLD IRON HOT BLOOD!
A YEAR AGO, WHEN I WAS SIX AND STILL A CHILD, I WAS STOLEN FROM FAMILY AND FRIENDS BY THE DEMON-LORD BELASCO, AND TAKEN TO THE MAGICAL LIMBO THAT WAS BOTH HIS DOMAIN AND HIS PRISON. I WAS TO BE THE MEANS OF HIS ESCAPE AND THEN OF THE CONQUEST OF EARTH BY HIS GODS, THE OTHER-DIMENSIONAL DARK ONES.
TODAY, HALF MY LIFETIME LATER, I AM FOURTEEN-- AND AS OLD AS TIME. MY HEART IS FULL OF GRIEF...
...MY THOUGHTS OF MEMORIES.
CAT -- A DEMON!
STAY WHERE YOU ARE, ILLYANA! I'LL HANDLE HIM!
MY NAME IS ILLYANA RASPUTIN.
CHRIS CLAREMONT writer
JOHN BUSCEMA penciler
TOM PALMER finisher
GLYNIS WEIN colorist
TOM ORZECHOWSKI letterer
LOUISE JONES, editor
JIM SHOOTER, chief

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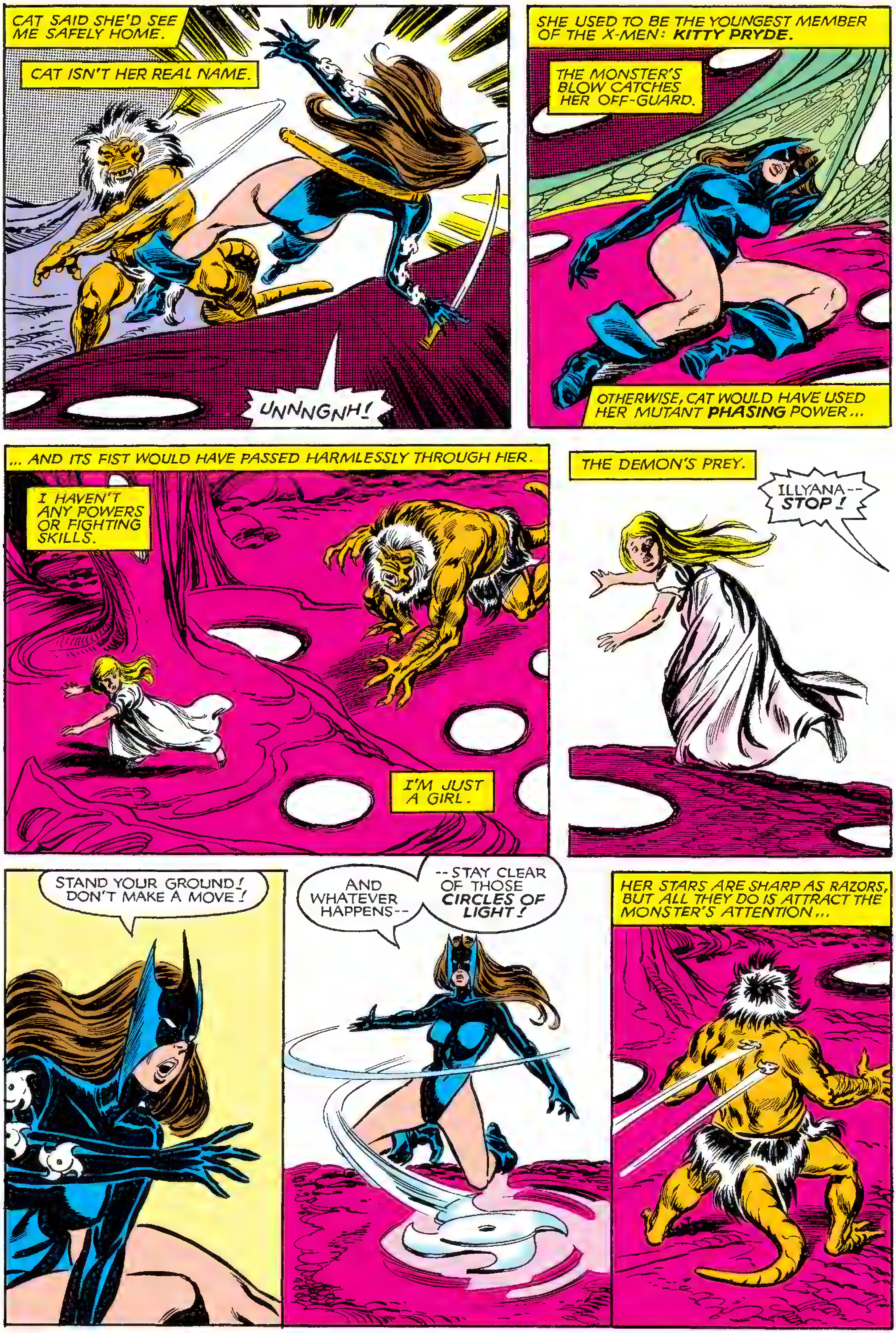
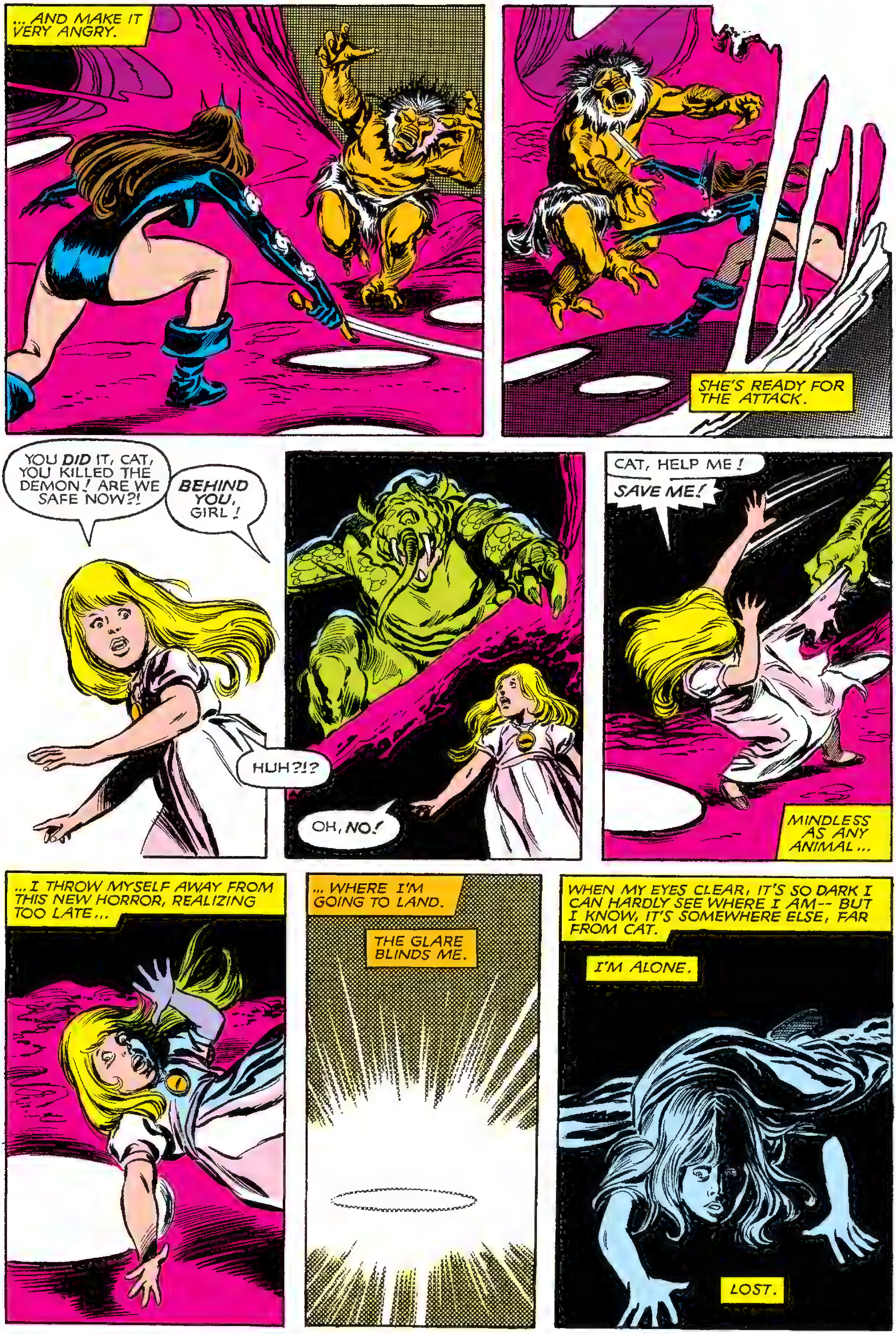
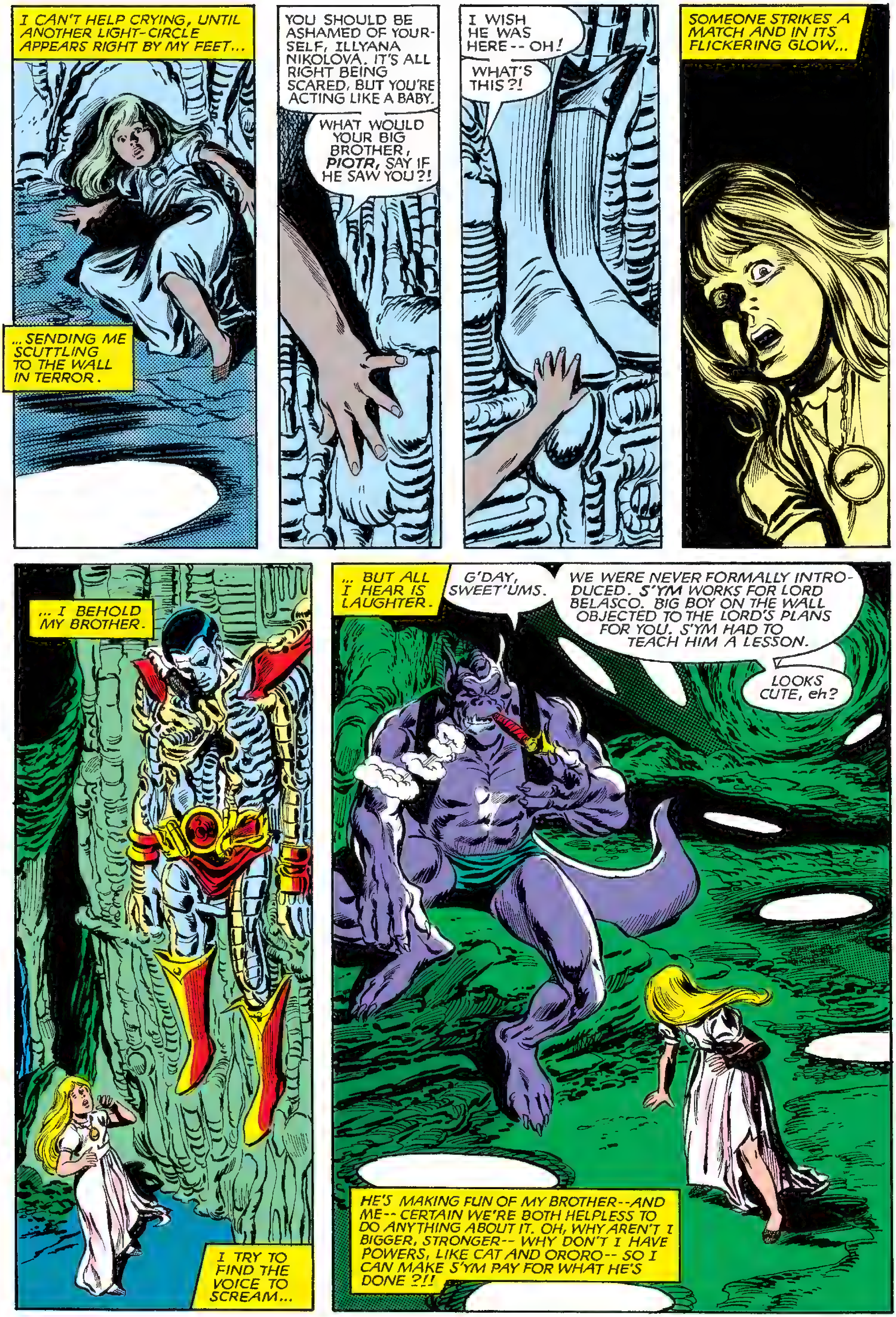
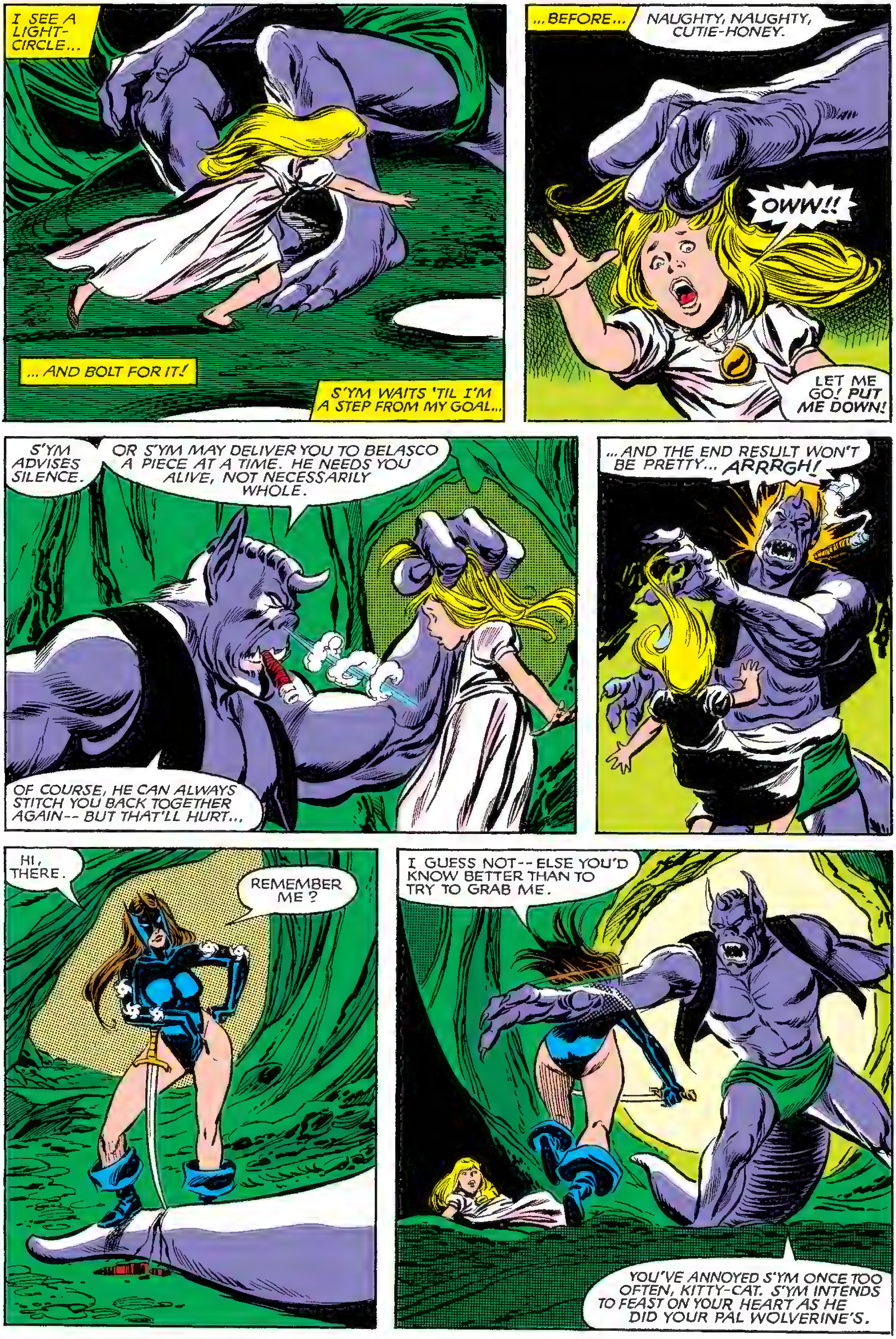
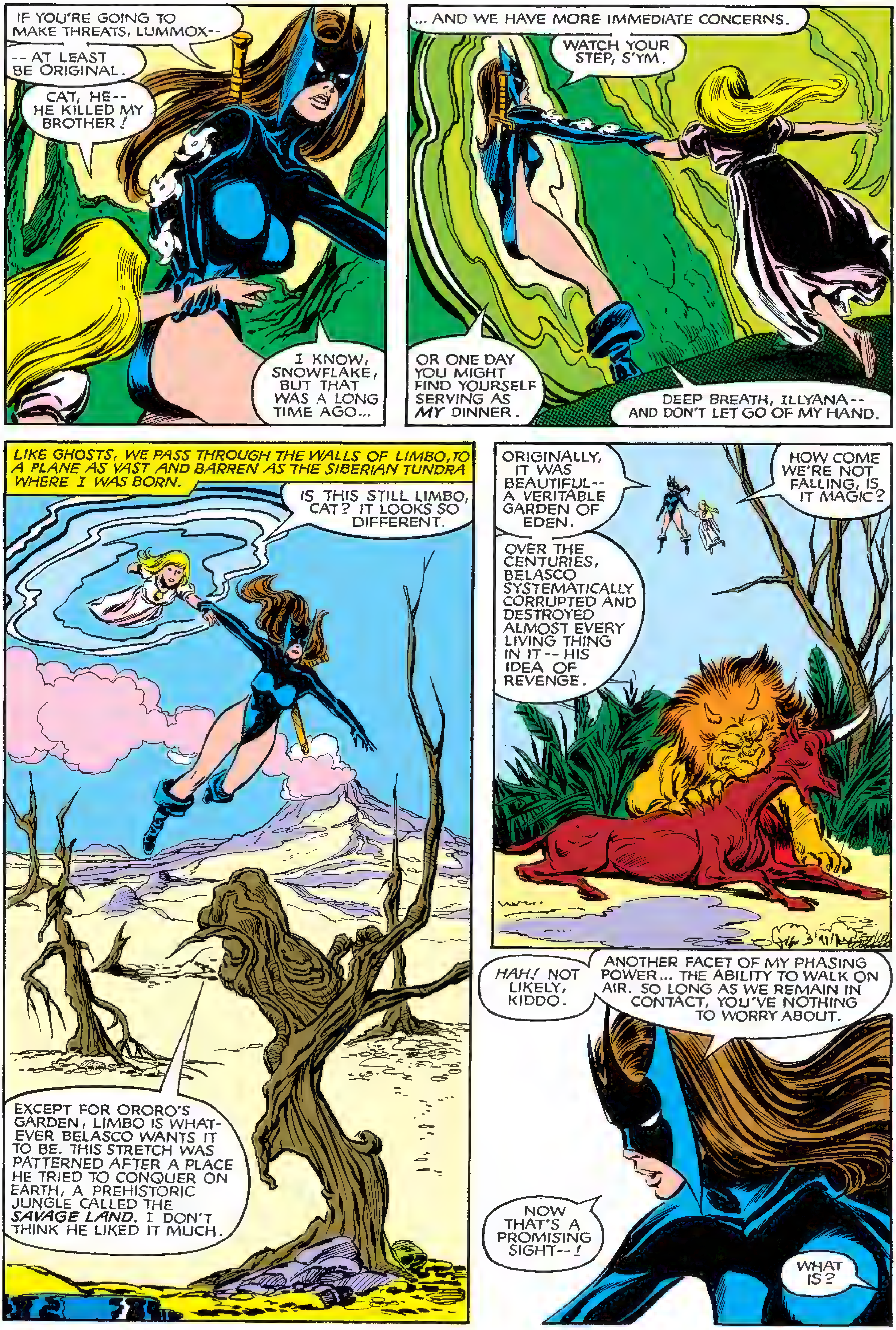
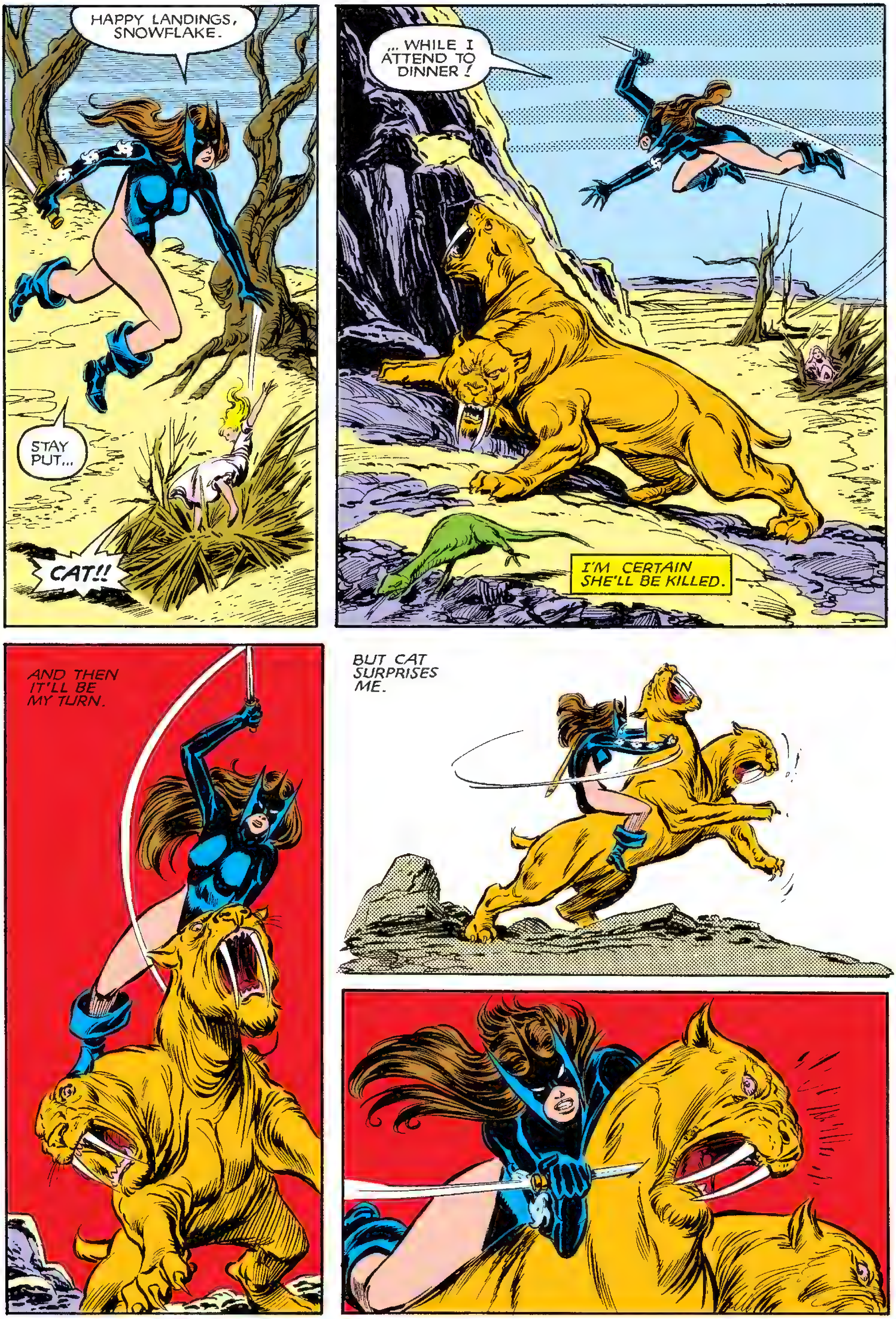

CAT SAID SHE'D SEE ME SAFELY HOME.
CAT ISN'T HER REAL NAME.
UNNNGNH!
SHE USED TO BE THE YOUNGEST MEMBER OF THE X-MEN: **KITTY PRYDE.**
THE MONSTER'S BLOW CATCHES HER OFF-GUARD.
OTHERWISE, CAT WOULD HAVE USED HER MUTANT **PHASING** POWER...
... AND ITS FIST WOULD HAVE PASSED HARMLESSLY THROUGH HER.
I HAVEN'T ANY POWERS OR FIGHTING SKILLS.
I'M JUST A GIRL.
THE DEMON'S PREY.
ILLYANA-- **STOP!**
STAND YOUR GROUND! DON'T MAKE A MOVE!
AND WHATEVER HAPPENS--
--STAY CLEAR OF THOSE **CIRCLES OF LIGHT!**
HER STARS ARE SHARP AS RAZORS, BUT ALL THEY DO IS ATTRACT THE MONSTER'S ATTENTION...

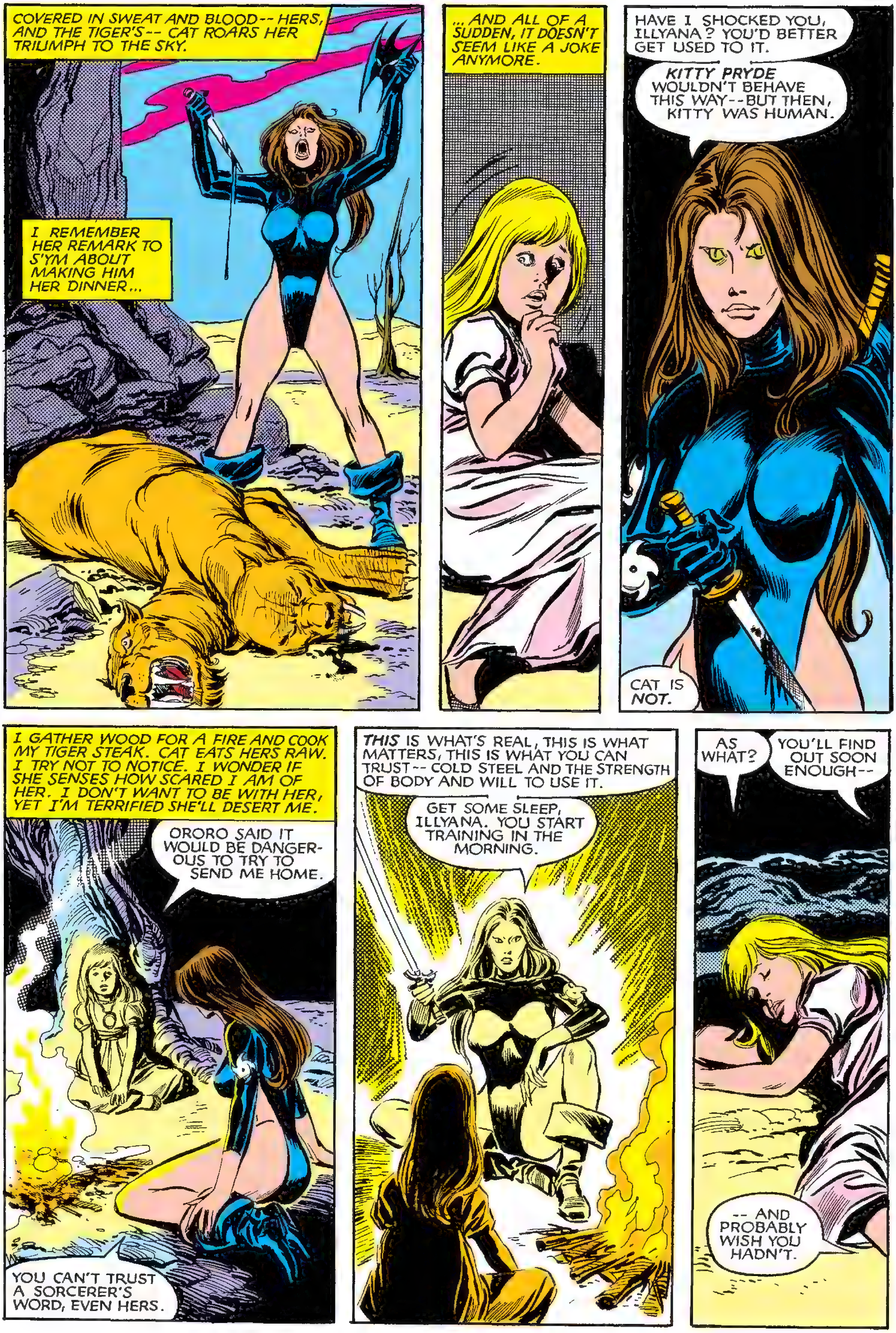

...AND MAKE IT VERY ANGRY.
SHE'S READY FOR THE ATTACK.
YOU *DID* IT, CAT, YOU KILLED THE DEMON! ARE WE SAFE NOW?!
BEHIND YOU, GIRL!
HUH?!?
OH, *NO!*
CAT, HELP ME!
SAVE ME!
MINDLESS AS ANY ANIMAL...
...I THROW MYSELF AWAY FROM THIS NEW HORROR, REALIZING TOO LATE...
...WHERE I'M GOING TO LAND.
THE GLARE BLINDS ME.
WHEN MY EYES CLEAR, IT'S SO DARK I CAN HARDLY SEE WHERE I AM-- BUT I KNOW, IT'S SOMEWHERE ELSE, FAR FROM CAT.
I'M ALONE.
LOST.

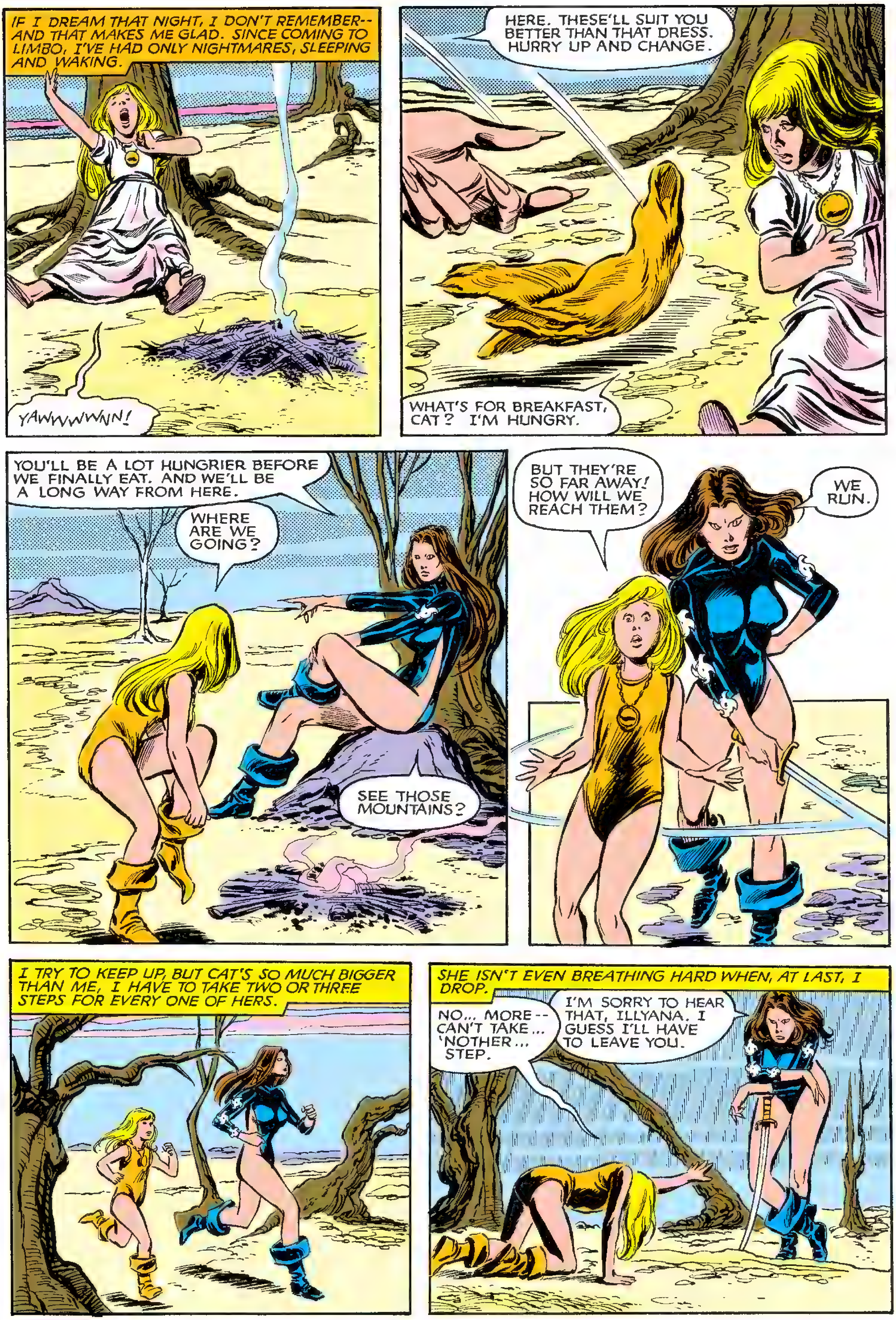

I CAN'T HELP CRYING, UNTIL ANOTHER LIGHT-CIRCLE APPEARS RIGHT BY MY FEET...
...SENDING ME SCUTTLING TO THE WALL IN TERROR.
YOU SHOULD BE ASHAMED OF YOURSELF, ILLYANA NIKOLOVA. IT'S ALL RIGHT BEING SCARED, BUT YOU'RE ACTING LIKE A BABY.
WHAT WOULD YOUR BIG BROTHER, **PIOTR,** SAY IF HE SAW YOU?!
I WISH HE WAS HERE -- OH!
WHAT'S THIS?!
SOMEONE STRIKES A MATCH AND IN ITS FLICKERING GLOW...
... I BEHOLD MY BROTHER.
I TRY TO FIND THE VOICE TO SCREAM...
... BUT ALL I HEAR IS LAUGHTER.
G'DAY, SWEET'UMS.
WE WERE NEVER FORMALLY INTRODUCED. **S'YM** WORKS FOR LORD BELASCO. BIG BOY ON THE WALL OBJECTED TO THE LORD'S PLANS FOR YOU. S'YM HAD TO TEACH HIM A LESSON.
LOOKS CUTE, eh?
HE'S MAKING FUN OF MY BROTHER--AND ME-- CERTAIN WE'RE BOTH HELPLESS TO DO ANYTHING ABOUT IT. OH, WHY AREN'T I BIGGER, STRONGER-- WHY DON'T I HAVE POWERS, LIKE CAT AND ORORO-- SO I CAN MAKE S'YM PAY FOR WHAT HE'S DONE?!!

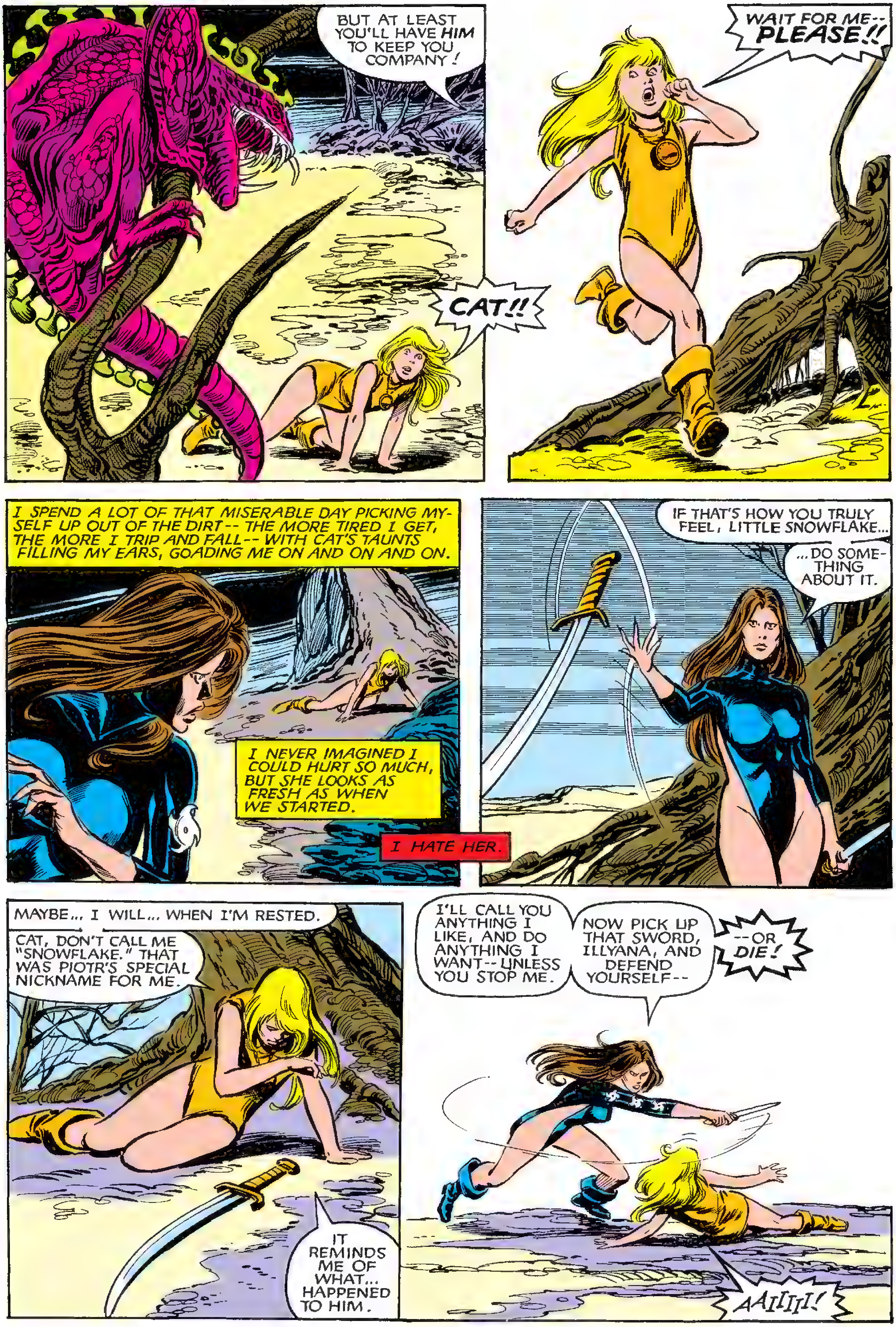

I SEE A LIGHT-CIRCLE...
...AND BOLT FOR IT!
S'YM WAITS 'TIL I'M A STEP FROM MY GOAL...
...BEFORE...
NAUGHTY, NAUGHTY, CUTIE-HONEY.
OWW!!
LET ME GO! PUT ME DOWN!
S'YM ADVISES SILENCE.
OR S'YM MAY DELIVER YOU TO BELASCO A PIECE AT A TIME. HE NEEDS YOU ALIVE, NOT NECESSARILY WHOLE.
OF COURSE, HE CAN ALWAYS STITCH YOU BACK TOGETHER AGAIN-- BUT THAT'LL HURT...
...AND THE END RESULT WON'T BE PRETTY... ARRRGH!
HI, THERE.
REMEMBER ME?
I GUESS NOT--ELSE YOU'D KNOW BETTER THAN TO TRY TO GRAB ME.
YOU'VE ANNOYED S'YM ONCE TOO OFTEN, KITTY-CAT. S'YM INTENDS TO FEAST ON YOUR HEART AS HE DID YOUR PAL WOLVERINE'S.

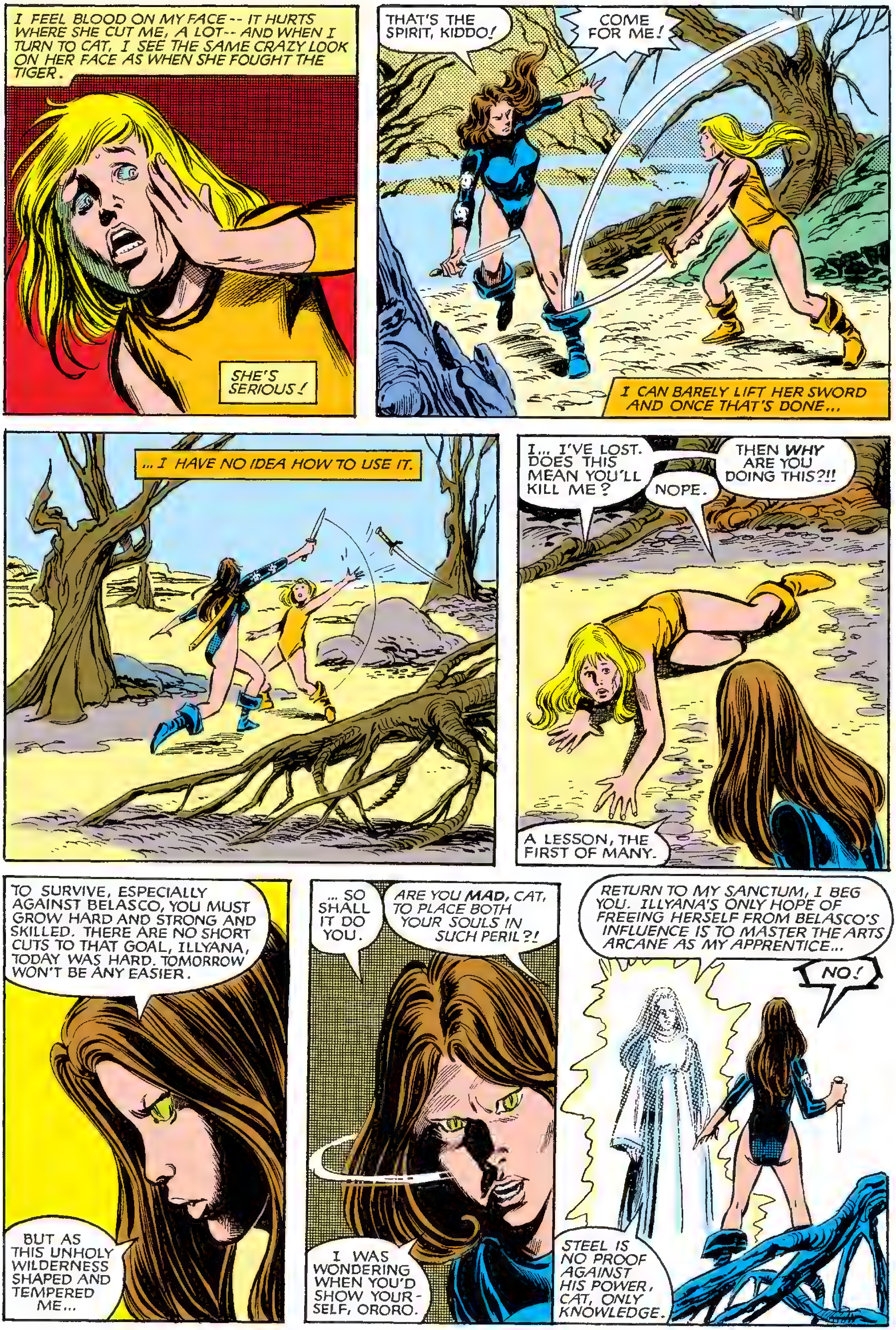

IF YOU'RE GOING TO MAKE THREATS, LUMMOX--
-- AT LEAST BE ORIGINAL.
CAT, HE-- HE KILLED MY BROTHER!
I KNOW, SNOWFLAKE, BUT THAT WAS A LONG TIME AGO...
... AND WE HAVE MORE IMMEDIATE CONCERNS.
WATCH YOUR STEP, S'YM.
OR ONE DAY YOU MIGHT FIND YOURSELF SERVING AS *MY* DINNER.
DEEP BREATH, ILLYANA-- AND DON'T LET GO OF MY HAND.
LIKE GHOSTS, WE PASS THROUGH THE WALLS OF LIMBO, TO A PLANE AS VAST AND BARREN AS THE SIBERIAN TUNDRA WHERE I WAS BORN.
IS THIS STILL LIMBO, CAT? IT LOOKS SO DIFFERENT.
EXCEPT FOR ORORO'S GARDEN, LIMBO IS WHATEVER BELASCO WANTS IT TO BE. THIS STRETCH WAS PATTERNED AFTER A PLACE HE TRIED TO CONQUER ON EARTH, A PREHISTORIC JUNGLE CALLED THE ***SAVAGE LAND***. I DON'T THINK HE LIKED IT MUCH.
ORIGINALLY, IT WAS BEAUTIFUL-- A VERITABLE GARDEN OF EDEN.
OVER THE CENTURIES, BELASCO SYSTEMATICALLY CORRUPTED AND DESTROYED ALMOST EVERY LIVING THING IN IT-- HIS IDEA OF REVENGE.
HOW COME WE'RE NOT FALLING, IS IT MAGIC?
HAH! NOT LIKELY, KIDDO.
ANOTHER FACET OF MY PHASING POWER... THE ABILITY TO WALK ON AIR. SO LONG AS WE REMAIN IN CONTACT, YOU'VE NOTHING TO WORRY ABOUT.
NOW THAT'S A PROMISING SIGHT--!
WHAT IS?

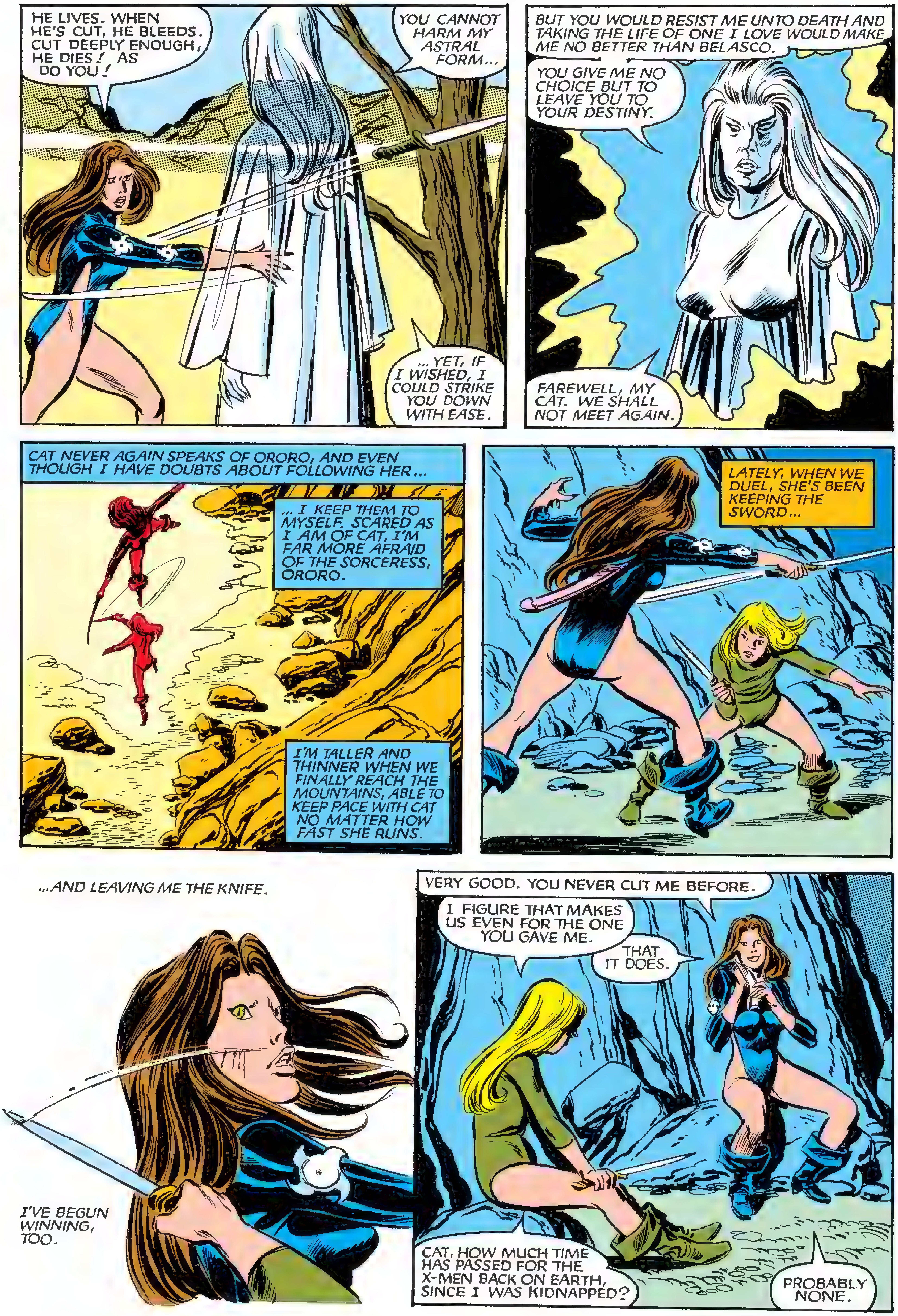

HAPPY LANDINGS, SNOWFLAKE.
STAY PUT...
CAT!!
...WHILE I ATTEND TO DINNER!
I'M CERTAIN SHE'LL BE KILLED.
AND THEN IT'LL BE MY TURN.
BUT CAT SURPRISES ME.

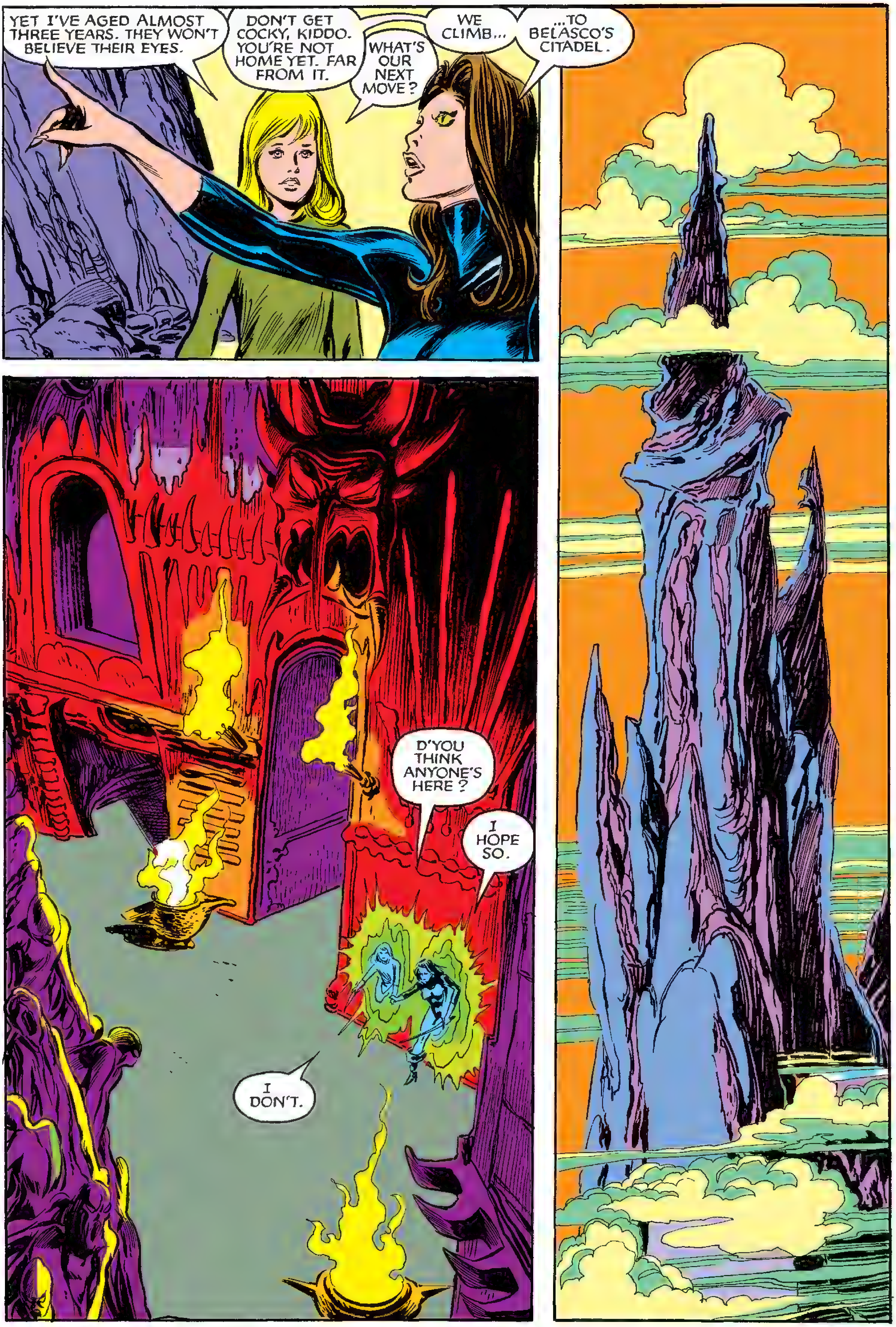

COVERED IN SWEAT AND BLOOD-- HERS, AND THE TIGER'S-- CAT ROARS HER TRIUMPH TO THE SKY.
I REMEMBER HER REMARK TO S'YM ABOUT MAKING HIM HER DINNER...
...AND ALL OF A SUDDEN, IT DOESN'T SEEM LIKE A JOKE ANYMORE.
HAVE I SHOCKED YOU, ILLYANA? YOU'D BETTER GET USED TO IT.
KITTY PRYDE WOULDN'T BEHAVE THIS WAY--BUT THEN, KITTY WAS HUMAN.
CAT IS NOT.
I GATHER WOOD FOR A FIRE AND COOK MY TIGER STEAK. CAT EATS HERS RAW. I TRY NOT TO NOTICE. I WONDER IF SHE SENSES HOW SCARED I AM OF HER. I DON'T WANT TO BE WITH HER, YET I'M TERRIFIED SHE'LL DESERT ME.
ORORO SAID IT WOULD BE DANGEROUS TO TRY TO SEND ME HOME.
YOU CAN'T TRUST A SORCERER'S WORD, EVEN HERS.
THIS IS WHAT'S REAL, THIS IS WHAT MATTERS, THIS IS WHAT YOU CAN TRUST-- COLD STEEL AND THE STRENGTH OF BODY AND WILL TO USE IT.
GET SOME SLEEP, ILLYANA. YOU START TRAINING IN THE MORNING.
AS WHAT?
YOU'LL FIND OUT SOON ENOUGH--
-- AND PROBABLY WISH YOU HADN'T.

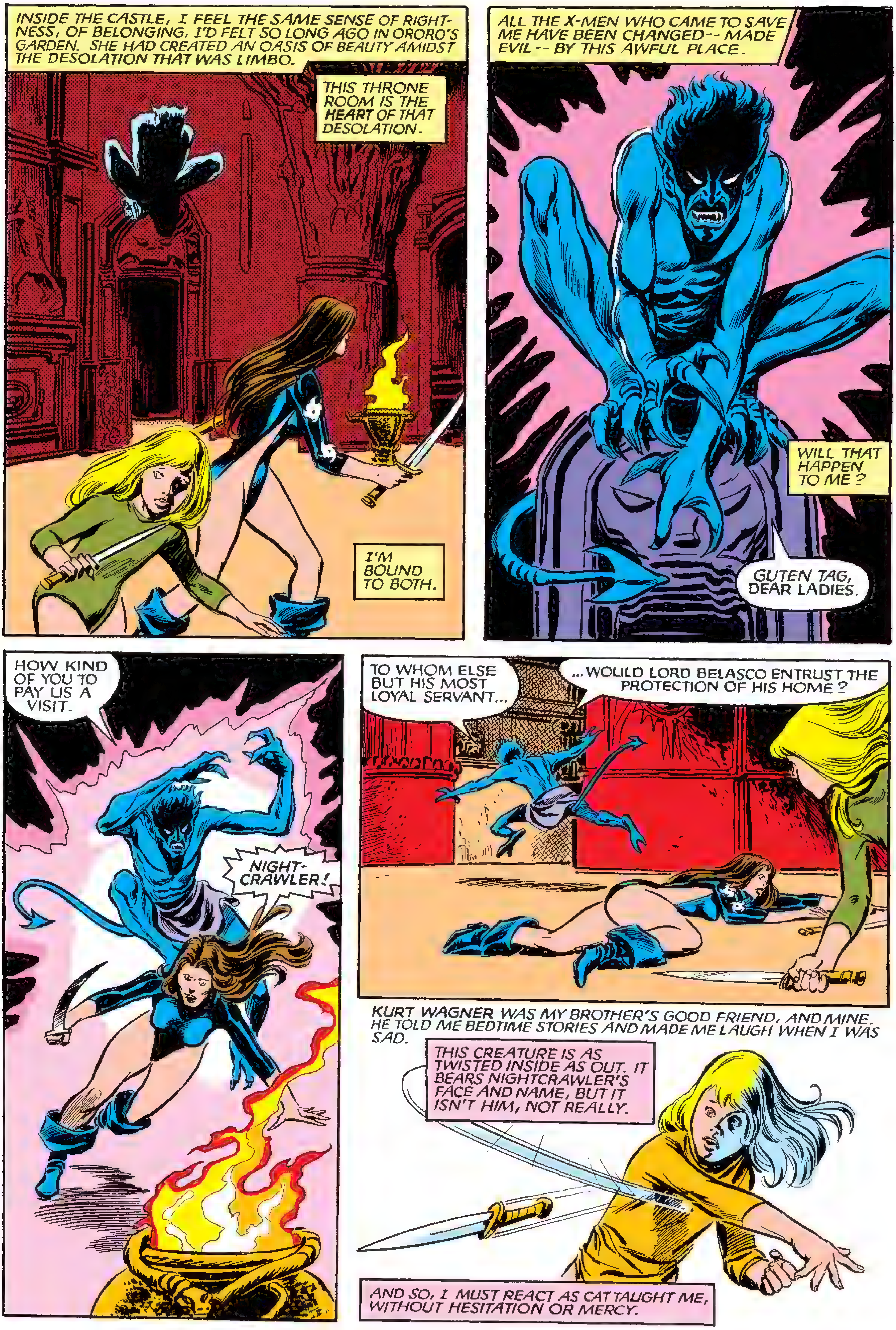

IF I DREAM THAT NIGHT, I DON'T REMEMBER-- AND THAT MAKES ME GLAD. SINCE COMING TO LIMBO, I'VE HAD ONLY NIGHTMARES, SLEEPING AND WAKING.
YAWWWWNN!
HERE. THESE'LL SUIT YOU BETTER THAN THAT DRESS. HURRY UP AND CHANGE.
WHAT'S FOR BREAKFAST, CAT? I'M HUNGRY.
YOU'LL BE A LOT HUNGRIER BEFORE WE FINALLY EAT. AND WE'LL BE A LONG WAY FROM HERE.
WHERE ARE WE GOING?
SEE THOSE MOUNTAINS?
BUT THEY'RE SO FAR AWAY! HOW WILL WE REACH THEM?
WE RUN.
I TRY TO KEEP UP, BUT CAT'S SO MUCH BIGGER THAN ME, I HAVE TO TAKE TWO OR THREE STEPS FOR EVERY ONE OF HERS.
SHE ISN'T EVEN BREATHING HARD WHEN, AT LAST, I DROP.
NO... MORE -- CAN'T TAKE... 'NOTHER... STEP.
I'M SORRY TO HEAR THAT, ILLYANA. I GUESS I'LL HAVE TO LEAVE YOU.

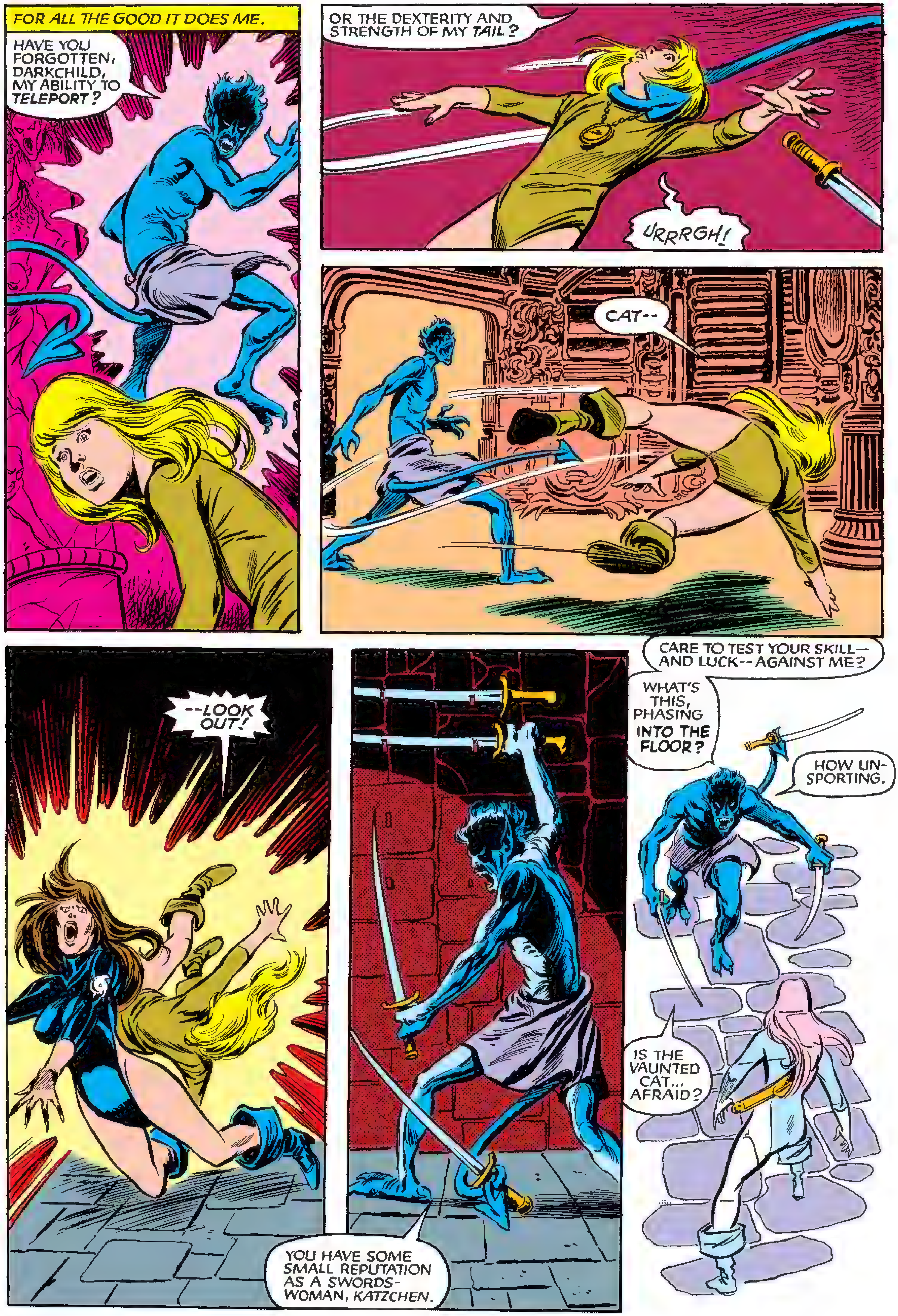

BUT AT LEAST YOU'LL HAVE *HIM* TO KEEP YOU COMPANY!
CAT!!
WAIT FOR ME-- **PLEASE!!**
I SPEND A LOT OF THAT MISERABLE DAY PICKING MYSELF UP OUT OF THE DIRT-- THE MORE TIRED I GET, THE MORE I TRIP AND FALL-- WITH CAT'S TAUNTS FILLING MY EARS, GOADING ME ON AND ON AND ON.
I NEVER IMAGINED I COULD HURT SO MUCH, BUT SHE LOOKS AS FRESH AS WHEN WE STARTED.
I HATE HER.
IF THAT'S HOW YOU TRULY FEEL, LITTLE SNOWFLAKE...
...DO SOMETHING ABOUT IT.
MAYBE... I WILL... WHEN I'M RESTED.
CAT, DON'T CALL ME "SNOWFLAKE." THAT WAS PIOTR'S SPECIAL NICKNAME FOR ME.
IT REMINDS ME OF WHAT... HAPPENED TO HIM.
I'LL CALL YOU ANYTHING I LIKE, AND DO ANYTHING I WANT-- UNLESS YOU STOP ME.
NOW PICK UP THAT SWORD, ILLYANA, AND DEFEND YOURSELF--
--OR *DIE!*
AAIIIII!

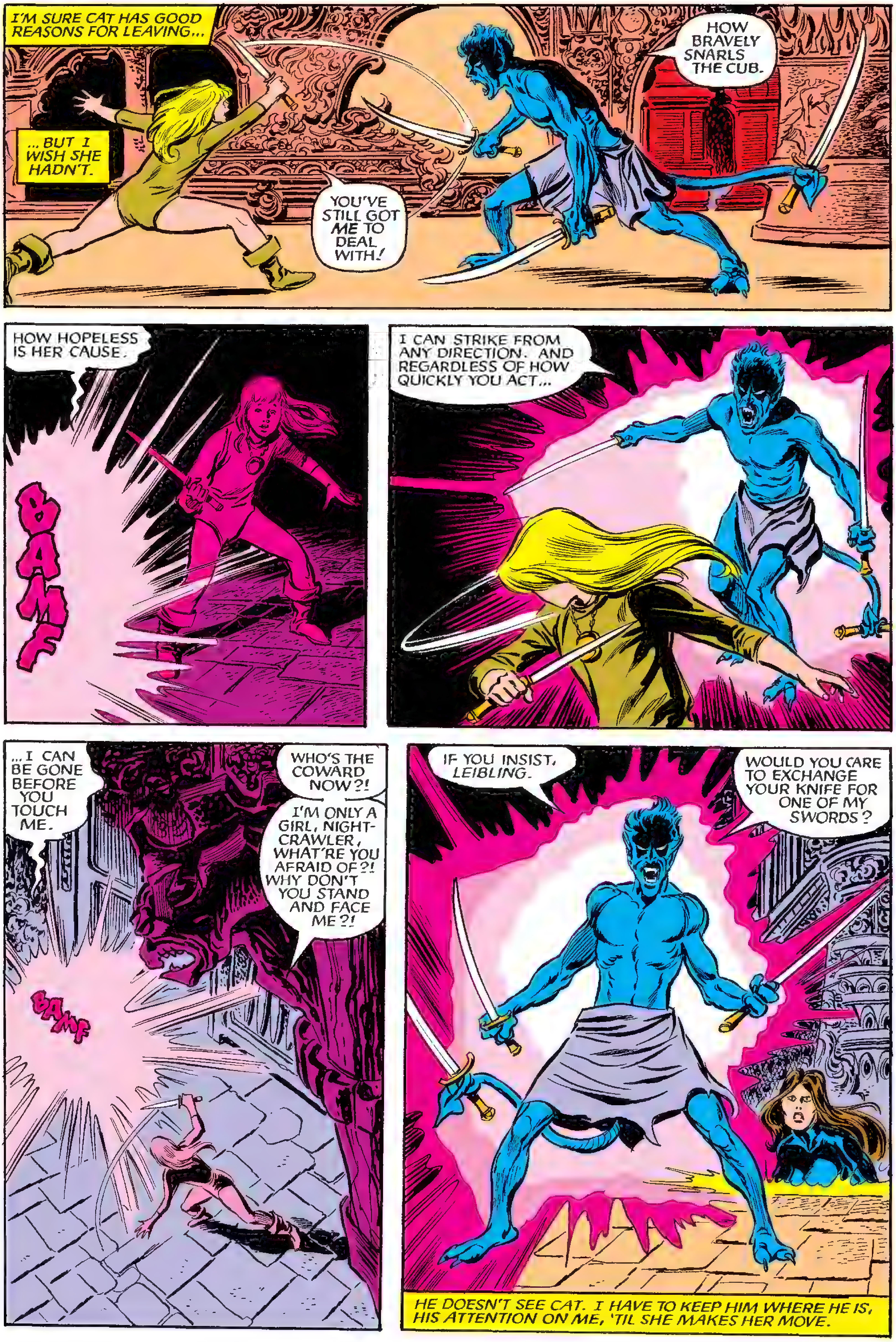

I FEEL BLOOD ON MY FACE -- IT HURTS WHERE SHE CUT ME, A LOT-- AND WHEN I TURN TO CAT, I SEE THE SAME CRAZY LOOK ON HER FACE AS WHEN SHE FOUGHT THE TIGER.
SHE'S SERIOUS!
THAT'S THE SPIRIT, KIDDO!
COME FOR ME!
I CAN BARELY LIFT HER SWORD AND ONCE THAT'S DONE...
...I HAVE NO IDEA HOW TO USE IT.
I... I'VE LOST. DOES THIS MEAN YOU'LL KILL ME?
NOPE.
THEN WHY ARE YOU DOING THIS?!!
A LESSON, THE FIRST OF MANY.
TO SURVIVE, ESPECIALLY AGAINST BELASCO, YOU MUST GROW HARD AND STRONG AND SKILLED. THERE ARE NO SHORT CUTS TO THAT GOAL, ILLYANA. TODAY WAS HARD. TOMORROW WON'T BE ANY EASIER.
BUT AS THIS UNHOLY WILDERNESS SHAPED AND TEMPERED ME...
...SO SHALL IT DO YOU.
ARE YOU MAD, CAT, TO PLACE BOTH YOUR SOULS IN SUCH PERIL?!
I WAS WONDERING WHEN YOU'D SHOW YOURSELF, ORORO.
RETURN TO MY SANCTUM, I BEG YOU. ILLYANA'S ONLY HOPE OF FREEING HERSELF FROM BELASCO'S INFLUENCE IS TO MASTER THE ARTS ARCANE AS MY APPRENTICE...
NO!
STEEL IS NO PROOF AGAINST HIS POWER, CAT, ONLY KNOWLEDGE.

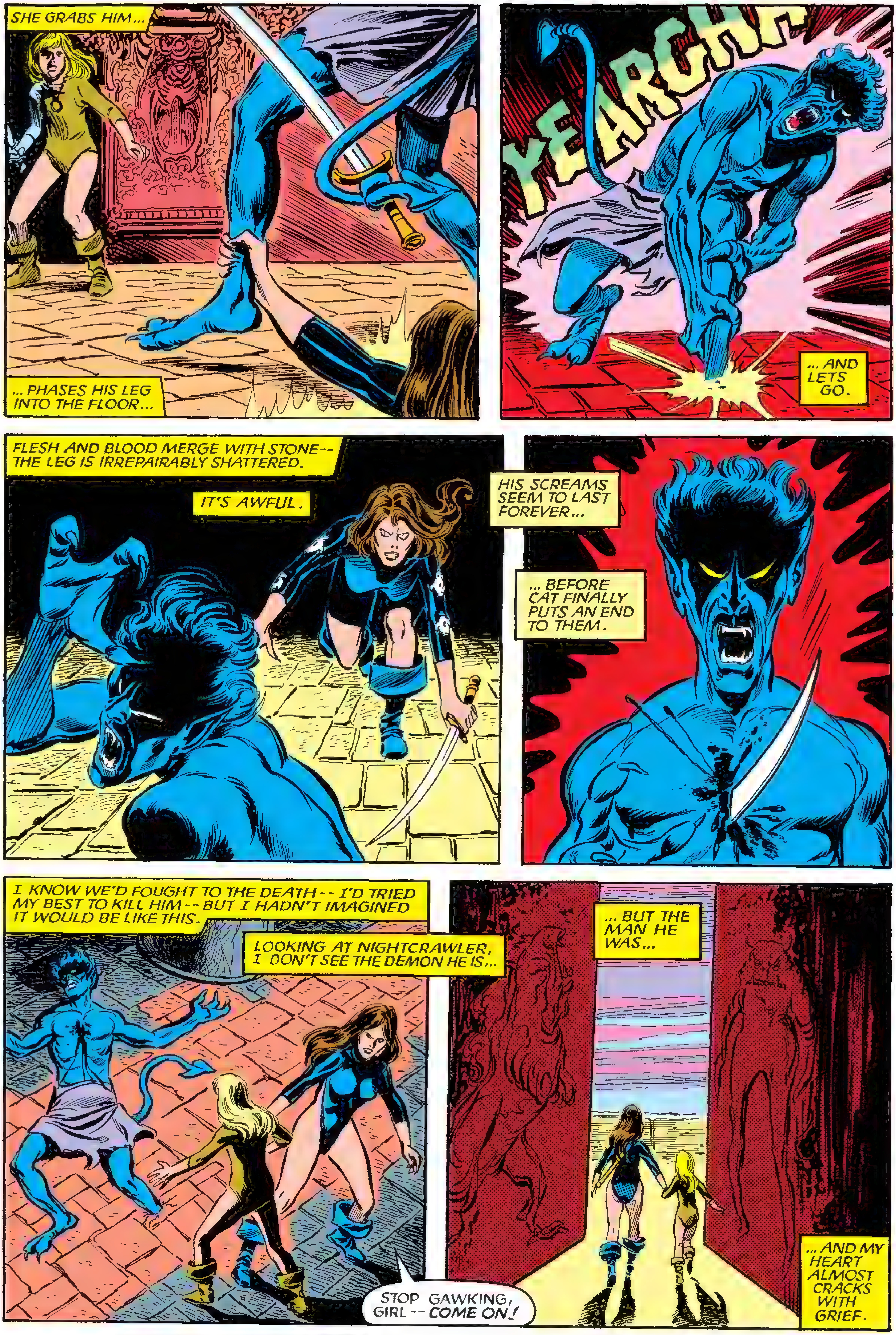

HE LIVES. WHEN HE'S CUT, HE BLEEDS. CUT DEEPLY ENOUGH, HE DIES! AS DO YOU!
YOU CANNOT HARM MY ASTRAL FORM...
...YET, IF I WISHED, I COULD STRIKE YOU DOWN WITH EASE.
BUT YOU WOULD RESIST ME UNTO DEATH AND TAKING THE LIFE OF ONE I LOVE WOULD MAKE ME NO BETTER THAN BELASCO.
YOU GIVE ME NO CHOICE BUT TO LEAVE YOU TO YOUR DESTINY.
FAREWELL, MY CAT. WE SHALL NOT MEET AGAIN.
CAT NEVER AGAIN SPEAKS OF ORORO, AND EVEN THOUGH I HAVE DOUBTS ABOUT FOLLOWING HER...
...I KEEP THEM TO MYSELF. SCARED AS I AM OF CAT, I'M FAR MORE AFRAID OF THE SORCERESS, ORORO.
I'M TALLER AND THINNER WHEN WE FINALLY REACH THE MOUNTAINS, ABLE TO KEEP PACE WITH CAT NO MATTER HOW FAST SHE RUNS.
LATELY, WHEN WE DUEL, SHE'S BEEN KEEPING THE SWORD...
...AND LEAVING ME THE KNIFE.
I'VE BEGUN WINNING, TOO.
VERY GOOD. YOU NEVER CUT ME BEFORE.
I FIGURE THAT MAKES US EVEN FOR THE ONE YOU GAVE ME.
THAT IT DOES.
CAT, HOW MUCH TIME HAS PASSED FOR THE X-MEN BACK ON EARTH, SINCE I WAS KIDNAPPED?
PROBABLY NONE.

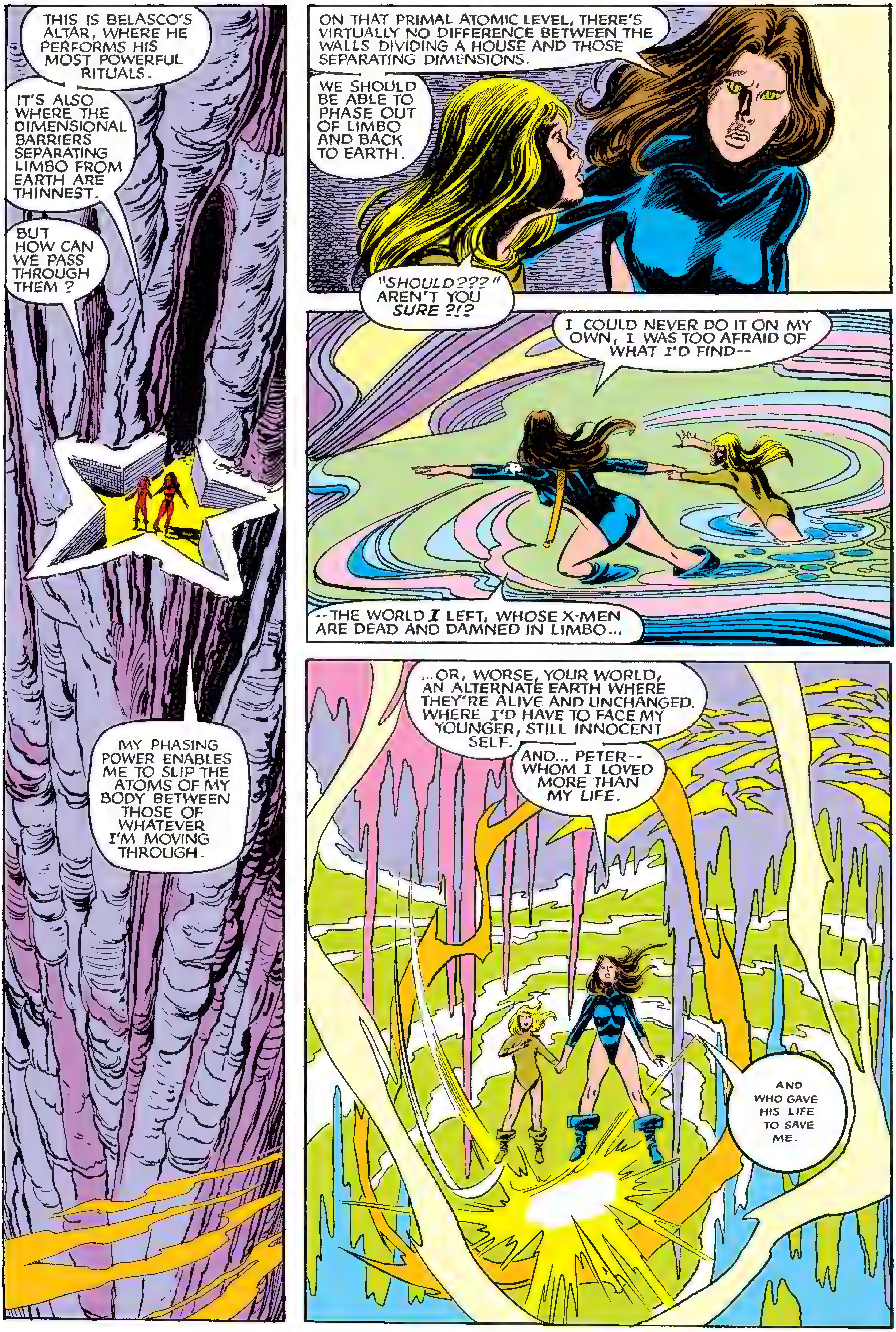

YET I'VE AGED ALMOST THREE YEARS. THEY WON'T BELIEVE THEIR EYES.
DON'T GET COCKY, KIDDO. YOU'RE NOT HOME YET. FAR FROM IT.
WHAT'S OUR NEXT MOVE?
WE CLIMB...
...TO BELASCO'S CITADEL.
D'YOU THINK ANYONE'S HERE?
I HOPE SO.
I DON'T.

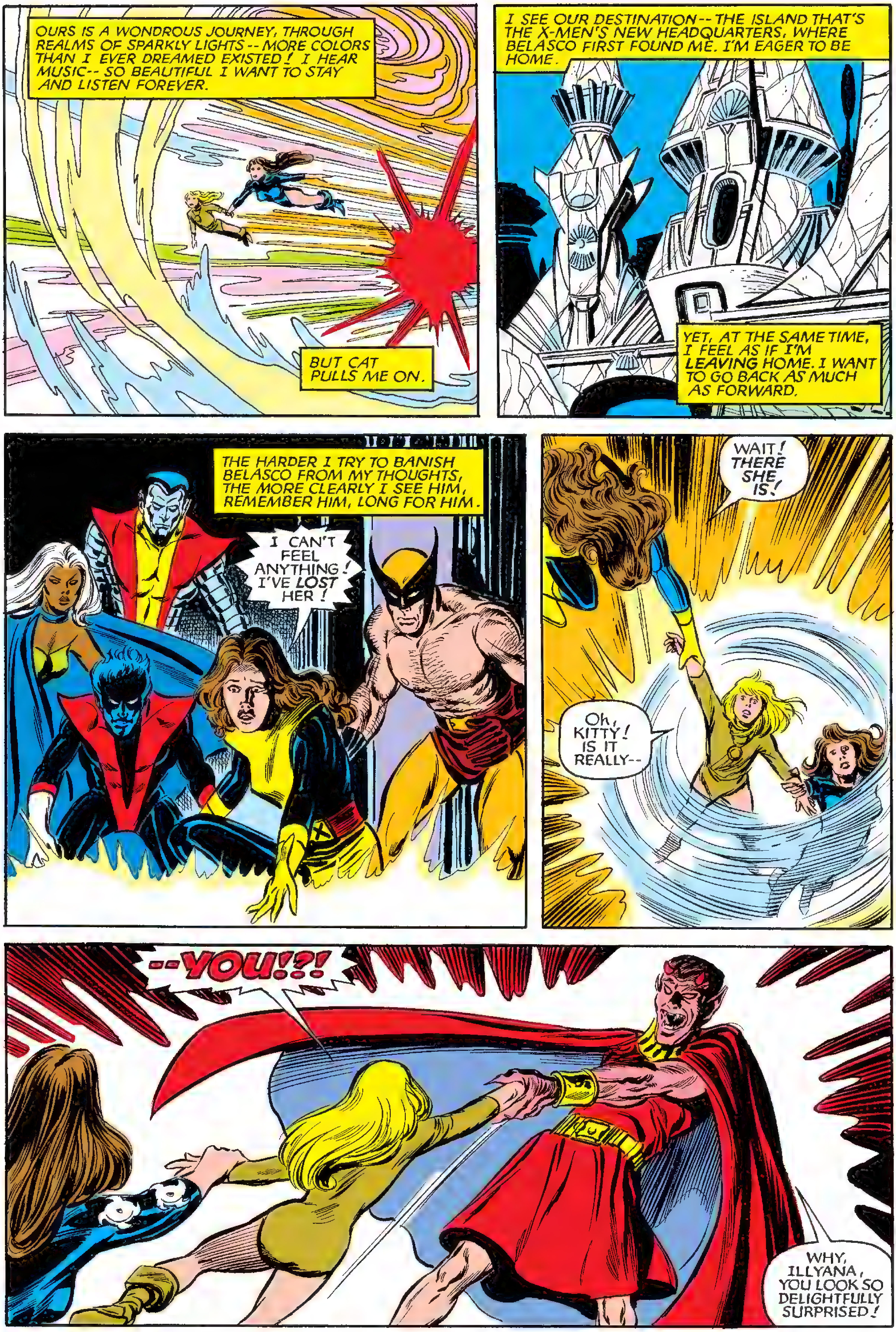

INSIDE THE CASTLE, I FEEL THE SAME SENSE OF RIGHTNESS, OF BELONGING, I'D FELT SO LONG AGO IN ORORO'S GARDEN. SHE HAD CREATED AN OASIS OF BEAUTY AMIDST THE DESOLATION THAT WAS LIMBO.
THIS THRONE ROOM IS THE **HEART** OF THAT DESOLATION.
I'M BOUND TO BOTH.
ALL THE X-MEN WHO CAME TO SAVE ME HAVE BEEN CHANGED-- MADE EVIL -- BY THIS AWFUL PLACE.
WILL THAT HAPPEN TO ME ?
GUTEN TAG, DEAR LADIES.
HOW KIND OF YOU TO PAY US A VISIT.
NIGHT-CRAWLER!
TO WHOM ELSE BUT HIS MOST LOYAL SERVANT...
...WOULD LORD BELASCO ENTRUST THE PROTECTION OF HIS HOME ?
KURT WAGNER WAS MY BROTHER'S GOOD FRIEND, AND MINE. HE TOLD ME BEDTIME STORIES AND MADE ME LAUGH WHEN I WAS SAD.
THIS CREATURE IS AS TWISTED INSIDE AS OUT. IT BEARS NIGHTCRAWLER'S FACE AND NAME, BUT IT ISN'T HIM, NOT REALLY.
AND SO, I MUST REACT AS CAT TAUGHT ME, WITHOUT HESITATION OR MERCY.

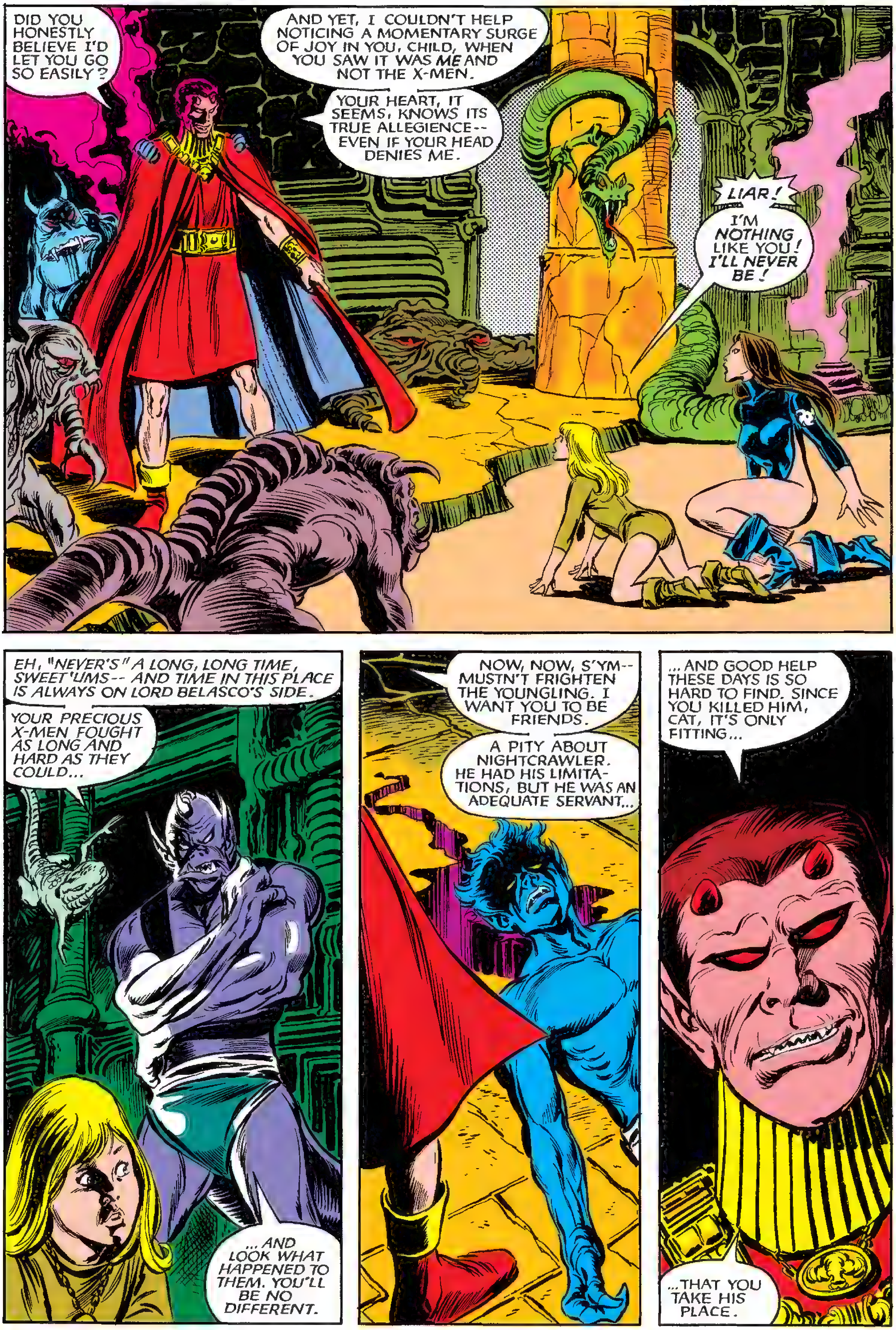

FOR ALL THE GOOD IT DOES ME.
HAVE YOU FORGOTTEN, DARKCHILD, MY ABILITY TO TELEPORT?
OR THE DEXTERITY AND STRENGTH OF MY TAIL?
URRRGH!
CAT--
--LOOK OUT!
YOU HAVE SOME SMALL REPUTATION AS A SWORDSWOMAN, KATZCHEN.
CARE TO TEST YOUR SKILL--AND LUCK--AGAINST ME?
WHAT'S THIS, PHASING INTO THE FLOOR?
HOW UNSPORTING.
IS THE VAUNTED CAT... AFRAID?

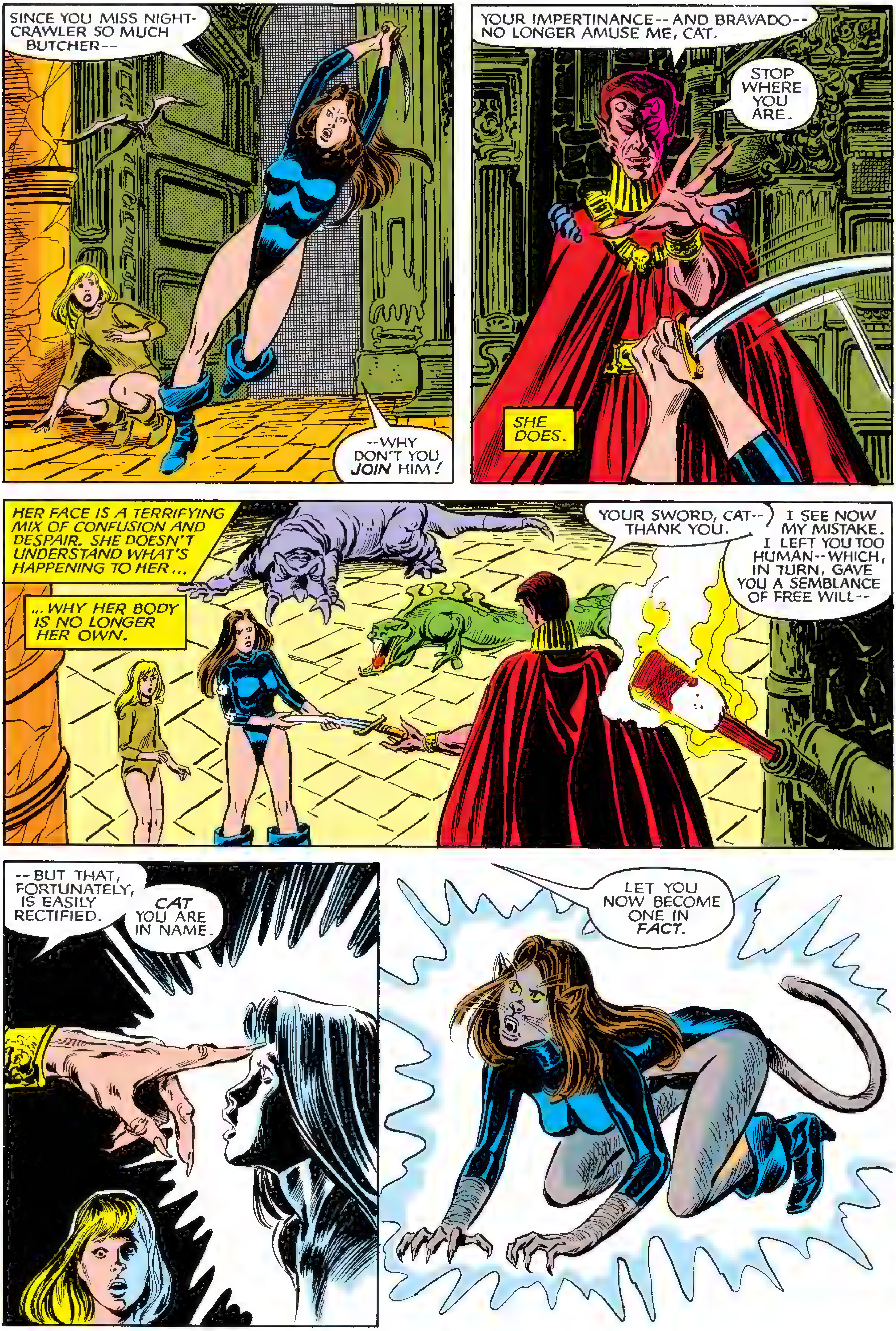

I'M SURE CAT HAS GOOD REASONS FOR LEAVING...
...BUT I WISH SHE HADN'T.
YOU'VE STILL GOT *ME* TO DEAL WITH!
HOW BRAVELY SNARLS THE CUB.
HOW HOPELESS IS HER CAUSE.
BAMF
I CAN STRIKE FROM ANY DIRECTION. AND REGARDLESS OF HOW QUICKLY YOU ACT...
...I CAN BE GONE BEFORE YOU TOUCH ME.
BAMF
WHO'S THE COWARD NOW?!
I'M ONLY A GIRL, NIGHTCRAWLER, WHAT'RE YOU AFRAID OF?! WHY DON'T YOU STAND AND FACE ME?!
IF YOU INSIST, *LEIBLING*.
WOULD YOU CARE TO EXCHANGE YOUR KNIFE FOR ONE OF MY SWORDS?
HE DOESN'T SEE CAT. I HAVE TO KEEP HIM WHERE HE IS, HIS ATTENTION ON ME, 'TIL SHE MAKES HER MOVE.

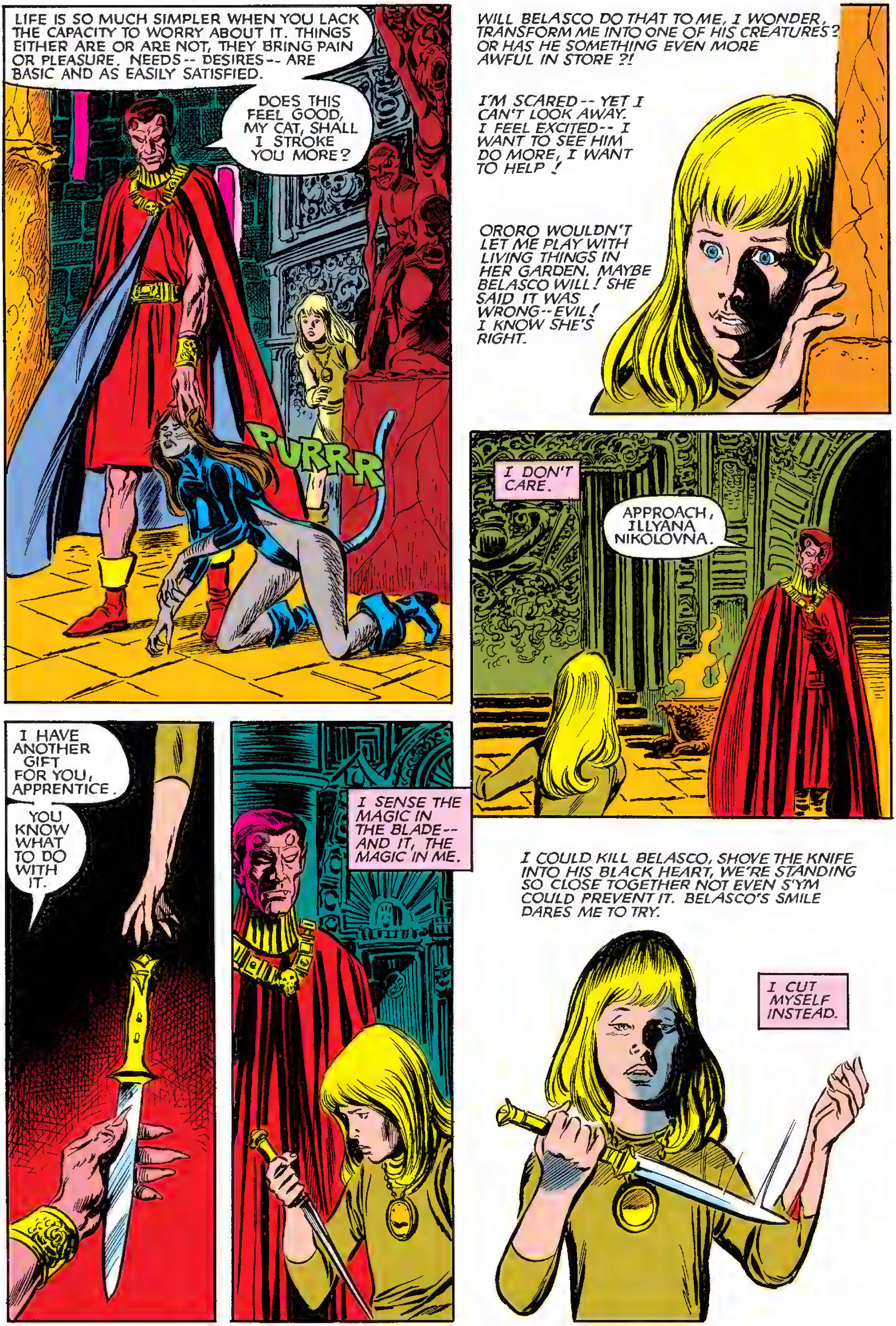

SHE GRABS HIM...
... PHASES HIS LEG INTO THE FLOOR...
YEARCHH
... AND LETS GO.
FLESH AND BLOOD MERGE WITH STONE-- THE LEG IS IRREPAIRABLY SHATTERED.
IT'S AWFUL.
HIS SCREAMS SEEM TO LAST FOREVER...
... BEFORE CAT FINALLY PUTS AN END TO THEM.
I KNOW WE'D FOUGHT TO THE DEATH -- I'D TRIED MY BEST TO KILL HIM -- BUT I HADN'T IMAGINED IT WOULD BE LIKE THIS.
LOOKING AT NIGHTCRAWLER, I DON'T SEE THE DEMON HE IS...
STOP GAWKING, GIRL -- COME ON!
... BUT THE MAN HE WAS...
... AND MY HEART ALMOST CRACKS WITH GRIEF.

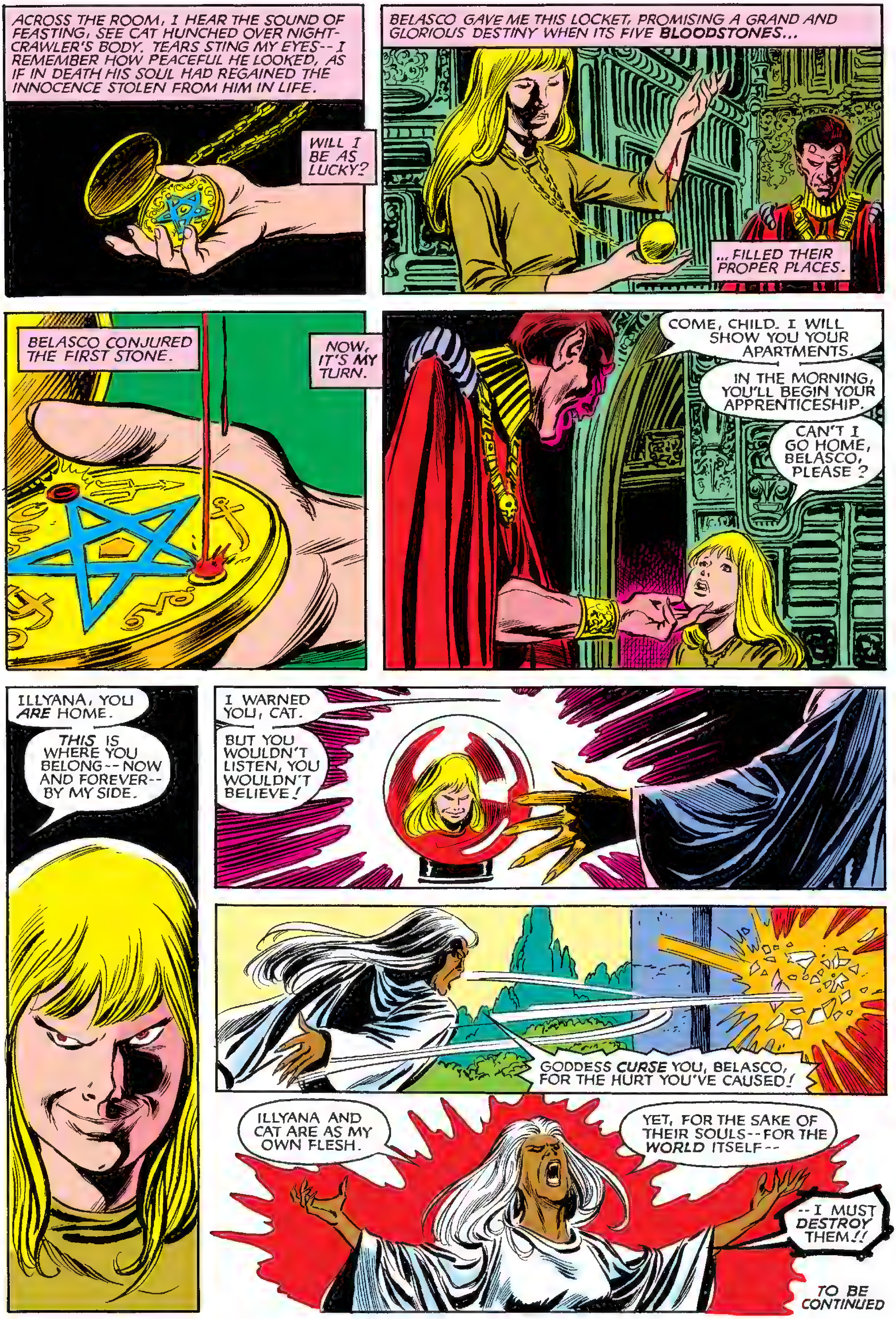

THIS IS BELASCO'S ALTAR, WHERE HE PERFORMS HIS MOST POWERFUL RITUALS.
IT'S ALSO WHERE THE DIMENSIONAL BARRIERS SEPARATING LIMBO FROM EARTH ARE THINNEST.
BUT HOW CAN WE PASS THROUGH THEM ?
MY PHASING POWER ENABLES ME TO SLIP THE ATOMS OF MY BODY BETWEEN THOSE OF WHATEVER I'M MOVING THROUGH.
ON THAT PRIMAL ATOMIC LEVEL, THERE'S VIRTUALLY NO DIFFERENCE BETWEEN THE WALLS DIVIDING A HOUSE AND THOSE SEPARATING DIMENSIONS.
WE SHOULD BE ABLE TO PHASE OUT OF LIMBO AND BACK TO EARTH.
"SHOULD???" AREN'T YOU SURE ?!?
I COULD NEVER DO IT ON MY OWN, I WAS TOO AFRAID OF WHAT I'D FIND--
--THE WORLD I LEFT, WHOSE X-MEN ARE DEAD AND DAMNED IN LIMBO...
...OR, WORSE, YOUR WORLD, AN ALTERNATE EARTH WHERE THEY'RE ALIVE AND UNCHANGED. WHERE I'D HAVE TO FACE MY YOUNGER, STILL INNOCENT SELF.
AND... PETER-- WHOM I LOVED MORE THAN MY LIFE.
AND WHO GAVE HIS LIFE TO SAVE ME.


OURS IS A WONDROUS JOURNEY, THROUGH REALMS OF SPARKLY LIGHTS -- MORE COLORS THAN I EVER DREAMED EXISTED! I HEAR MUSIC -- SO BEAUTIFUL I WANT TO STAY AND LISTEN FOREVER.
BUT CAT PULLS ME ON.
I SEE OUR DESTINATION -- THE ISLAND THAT'S THE X-MEN'S NEW HEADQUARTERS, WHERE BELASCO FIRST FOUND ME. I'M EAGER TO BE HOME.
YET, AT THE SAME TIME, I FEEL AS IF I'M LEAVING HOME. I WANT TO GO BACK AS MUCH AS FORWARD.
THE HARDER I TRY TO BANISH BELASCO FROM MY THOUGHTS, THE MORE CLEARLY I SEE HIM, REMEMBER HIM, LONG FOR HIM.
I CAN'T FEEL ANYTHING! I'VE LOST HER!
WAIT! THERE SHE IS!
Oh, KITTY! IS IT REALLY--
--YOU!?!
WHY, ILLYANA, YOU LOOK SO DELIGHTFULLY SURPRISED!


DID YOU HONESTLY BELIEVE I'D LET YOU GO SO EASILY?
AND YET, I COULDN'T HELP NOTICING A MOMENTARY SURGE OF JOY IN YOU, CHILD, WHEN YOU SAW IT WAS *ME* AND NOT THE X-MEN.
YOUR HEART, IT SEEMS, KNOWS ITS TRUE ALLEGIENCE-- EVEN IF YOUR HEAD DENIES ME.
LIAR!
I'M *NOTHING* LIKE YOU! *I'LL NEVER BE!*
EH, "NEVER'S" A LONG, LONG TIME, SWEET'UMS-- AND TIME IN THIS PLACE IS ALWAYS ON LORD BELASCO'S SIDE.
YOUR PRECIOUS X-MEN FOUGHT AS LONG AND HARD AS THEY COULD...
...AND LOOK WHAT HAPPENED TO THEM. YOU'LL BE NO DIFFERENT.
NOW, NOW, S'YM-- MUSTN'T FRIGHTEN THE YOUNGLING. I WANT YOU TO BE FRIENDS.
A PITY ABOUT NIGHTCRAWLER. HE HAD HIS LIMITATIONS, BUT HE WAS AN ADEQUATE SERVANT...
...AND GOOD HELP THESE DAYS IS SO HARD TO FIND. SINCE YOU KILLED HIM, CAT, IT'S ONLY FITTING...
...THAT YOU TAKE HIS PLACE.


SINCE YOU MISS NIGHTCRAWLER SO MUCH BUTCHER--
--WHY DON'T YOU *JOIN* HIM!
YOUR IMPERTINANCE--AND BRAVADO--NO LONGER AMUSE ME, CAT.
STOP WHERE YOU ARE.
SHE DOES.
HER FACE IS A TERRIFYING MIX OF CONFUSION AND DESPAIR. SHE DOESN'T UNDERSTAND WHAT'S HAPPENING TO HER ...
...WHY HER BODY IS NO LONGER HER OWN.
YOUR SWORD, CAT-- THANK YOU.
I SEE NOW MY MISTAKE. I LEFT YOU TOO HUMAN--WHICH, IN TURN, GAVE YOU A SEMBLANCE OF FREE WILL--
--BUT THAT, FORTUNATELY, IS EASILY RECTIFIED.
CAT YOU ARE IN NAME.
LET YOU NOW BECOME ONE IN *FACT.*


LIFE IS SO MUCH SIMPLER WHEN YOU LACK THE CAPACITY TO WORRY ABOUT IT. THINGS EITHER ARE OR ARE NOT, THEY BRING PAIN OR PLEASURE. NEEDS -- DESIRES -- ARE BASIC AND AS EASILY SATISFIED.
DOES THIS FEEL GOOD, MY CAT, SHALL I STROKE YOU MORE?
PURRRR
WILL BELASCO DO THAT TO ME, I WONDER, TRANSFORM ME INTO ONE OF HIS CREATURES? OR HAS HE SOMETHING EVEN MORE AWFUL IN STORE ?!
I'M SCARED -- YET I CAN'T LOOK AWAY. I FEEL EXCITED -- I WANT TO SEE HIM DO MORE, I WANT TO HELP !
ORORO WOULDN'T LET ME PLAY WITH LIVING THINGS IN HER GARDEN. MAYBE BELASCO WILL ! SHE SAID IT WAS WRONG -- EVIL ! I KNOW SHE'S RIGHT.
I DON'T CARE.
APPROACH, ILLYANA NIKOLOVNA.
I HAVE ANOTHER GIFT FOR YOU, APPRENTICE.
YOU KNOW WHAT TO DO WITH IT.
I SENSE THE MAGIC IN THE BLADE -- AND IT, THE MAGIC IN ME.
I COULD KILL BELASCO, SHOVE THE KNIFE INTO HIS BLACK HEART, WE'RE STANDING SO CLOSE TOGETHER NOT EVEN S'YM COULD PREVENT IT. BELASCO'S SMILE DARES ME TO TRY.
I CUT MYSELF INSTEAD.


ACROSS THE ROOM, I HEAR THE SOUND OF FEASTING, SEE CAT HUNCHED OVER NIGHTCRAWLER'S BODY. TEARS STING MY EYES--I REMEMBER HOW PEACEFUL HE LOOKED, AS IF IN DEATH HIS SOUL HAD REGAINED THE INNOCENCE STOLEN FROM HIM IN LIFE.
WILL I BE AS LUCKY?
BELASCO GAVE ME THIS LOCKET, PROMISING A GRAND AND GLORIOUS DESTINY WHEN ITS FIVE **BLOODSTONES**...
...FILLED THEIR PROPER PLACES.
BELASCO CONJURED THE FIRST STONE.
NOW, IT'S *MY* TURN.
COME, CHILD. I WILL SHOW YOU YOUR APARTMENTS.
IN THE MORNING, YOU'LL BEGIN YOUR APPRENTICESHIP.
CAN'T I GO HOME, BELASCO, PLEASE ?
ILLYANA, YOU *ARE* HOME.
THIS IS WHERE YOU BELONG--NOW AND FOREVER--BY MY SIDE.
I WARNED YOU, CAT.
BUT YOU WOULDN'T LISTEN, YOU WOULDN'T BELIEVE!
GODDESS *CURSE* YOU, BELASCO, FOR THE HURT YOU'VE CAUSED!
ILLYANA AND CAT ARE AS MY OWN FLESH.
YET, FOR THE SAKE OF THEIR SOULS--FOR THE *WORLD* ITSELF--
--I MUST *DESTROY* THEM!!
TO BE CONTINUED

MARVEL®

FROM THE X-MEN®

STORM™ AND ILLYANA™

MAGIK™

#3 IN A FOUR-ISSUE LIMITED SERIES

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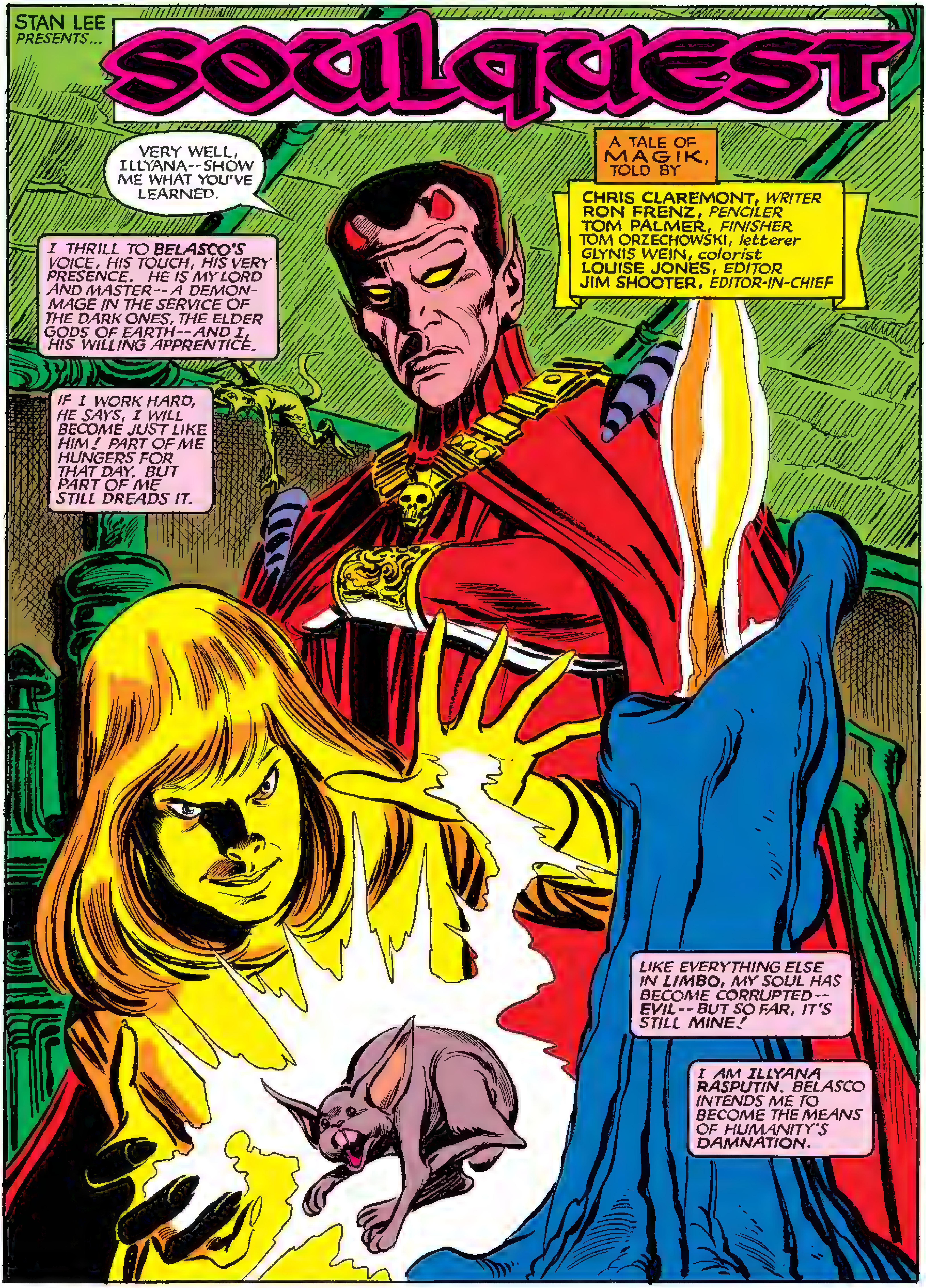
MY *LOVE* OR STORM'S *LIFE,* ILLYANA--
--CHOOSE!
FRENZ & PALMER


STAN LEE PRESENTS...
SOULQUEST
VERY WELL, ILLYANA--SHOW ME WHAT YOU'VE LEARNED.
A TALE OF MAGIK, TOLD BY
CHRIS CLAREMONT, WRITER
RON FRENZ, PENCILER
TOM PALMER, FINISHER
TOM ORZECHOWSKI, letterer
GLYNIS WEIN, colorist
LOUISE JONES, EDITOR
JIM SHOOTER, EDITOR-IN-CHIEF
I THRILL TO BELASCO'S VOICE, HIS TOUCH, HIS VERY PRESENCE. HE IS MY LORD AND MASTER--A DEMON-MAGE IN THE SERVICE OF THE DARK ONES, THE ELDER GODS OF EARTH--AND I, HIS WILLING APPRENTICE.
IF I WORK HARD, HE SAYS, I WILL BECOME JUST LIKE HIM! PART OF ME HUNGERS FOR THAT DAY. BUT PART OF ME STILL DREADS IT.
LIKE EVERYTHING ELSE IN LIMBO, MY SOUL HAS BECOME CORRUPTED--EVIL--BUT SO FAR, IT'S STILL MINE!
I AM ILLYANA RASPUTIN. BELASCO INTENDS ME TO BECOME THE MEANS OF HUMANITY'S DAMNATION.

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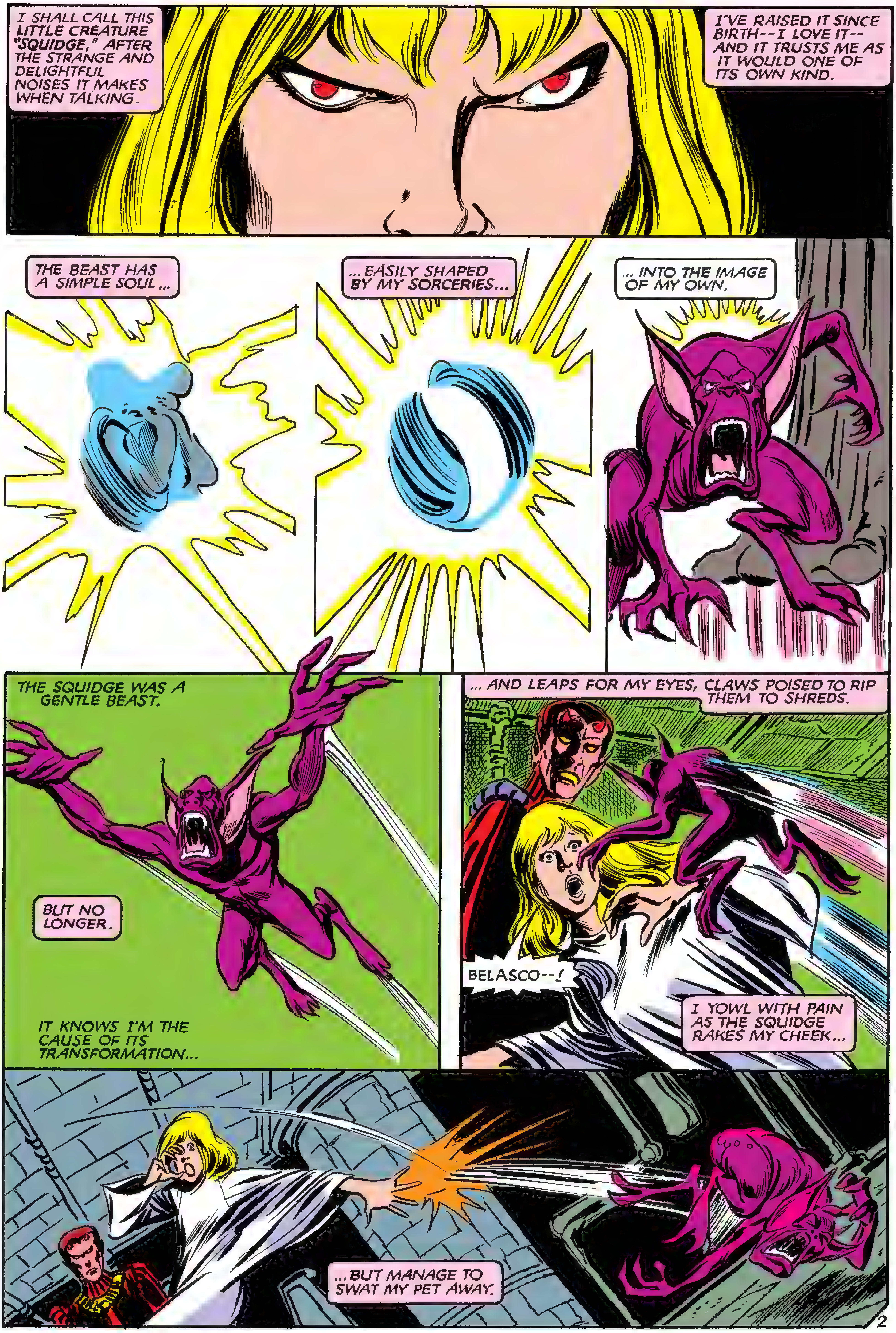
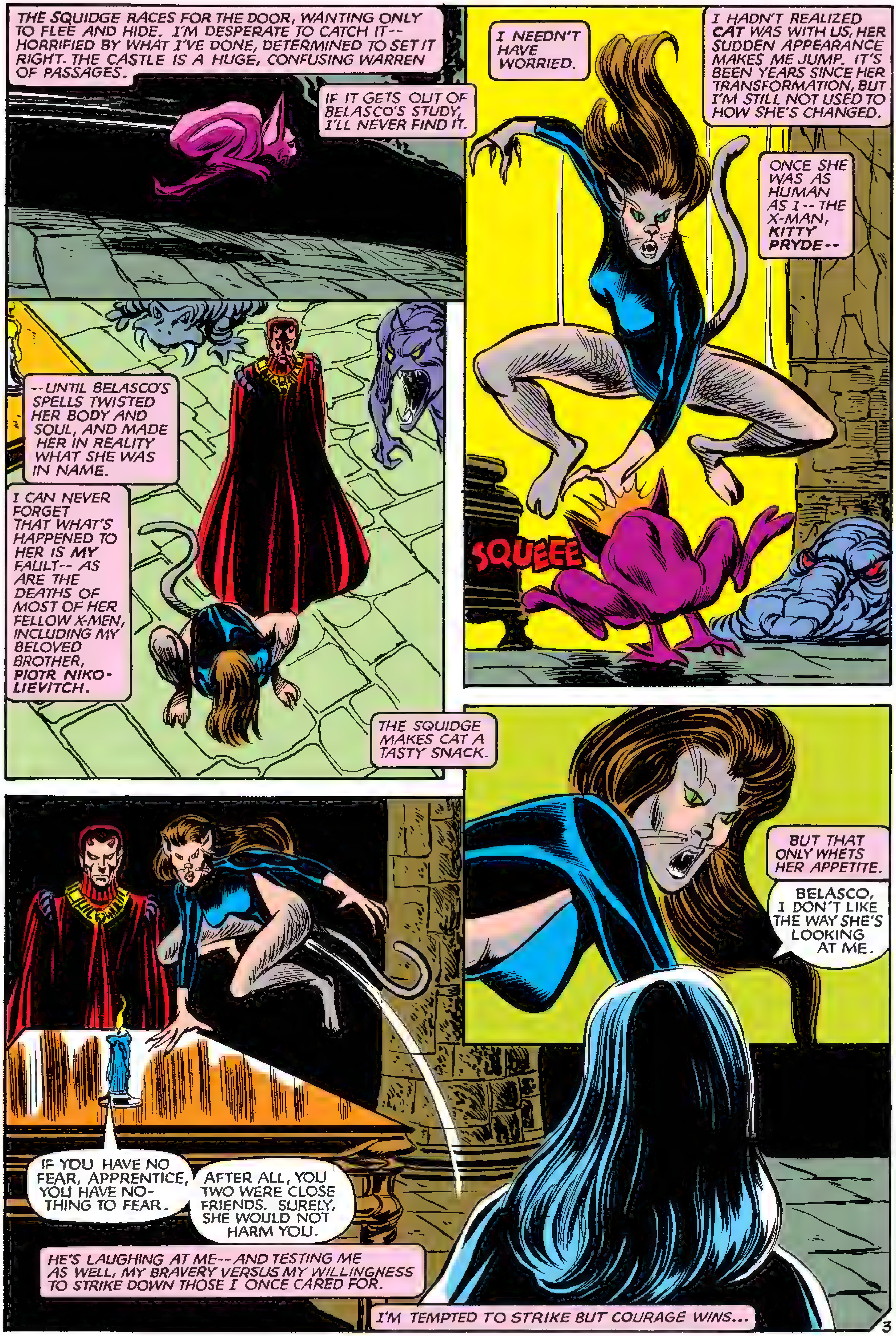
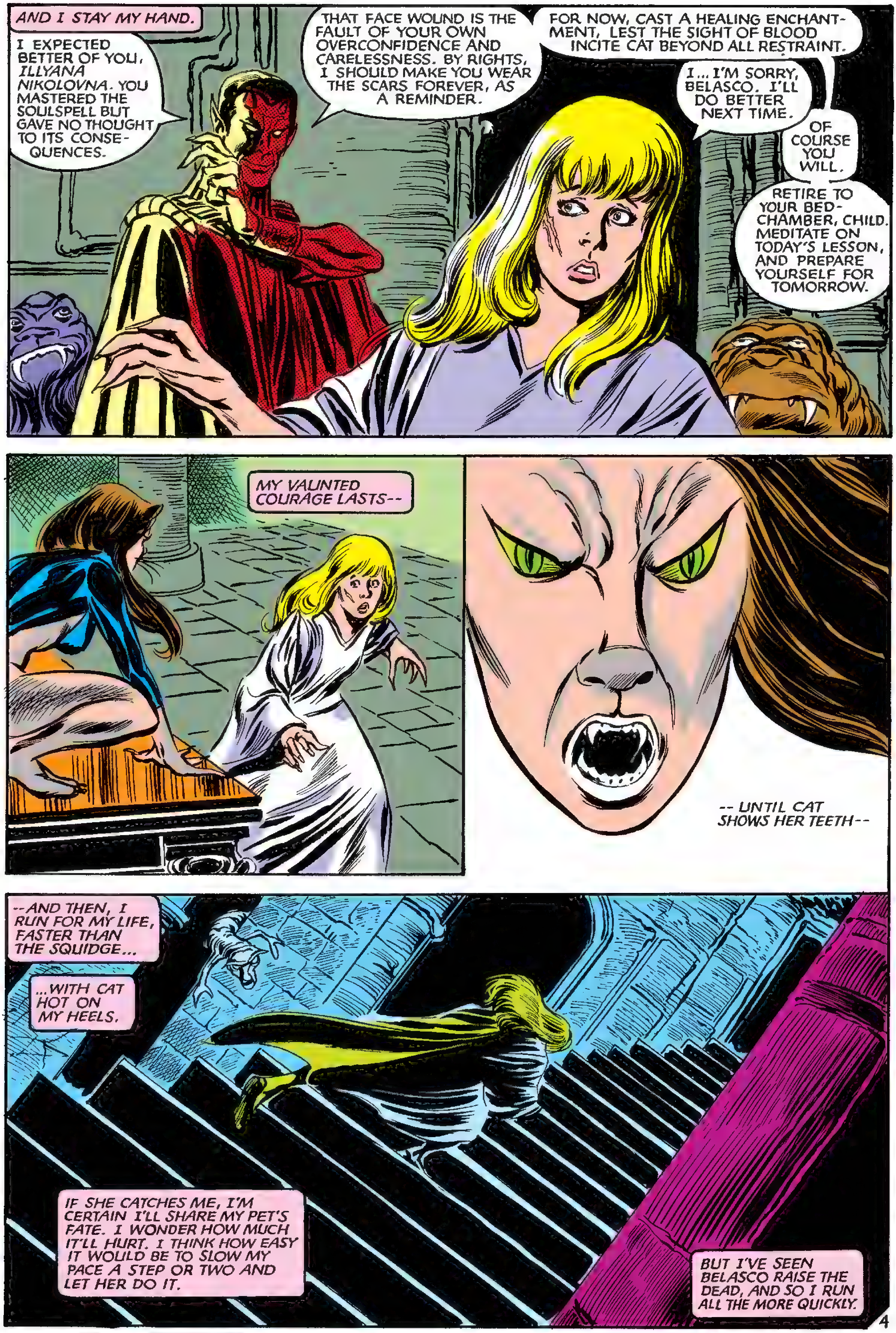
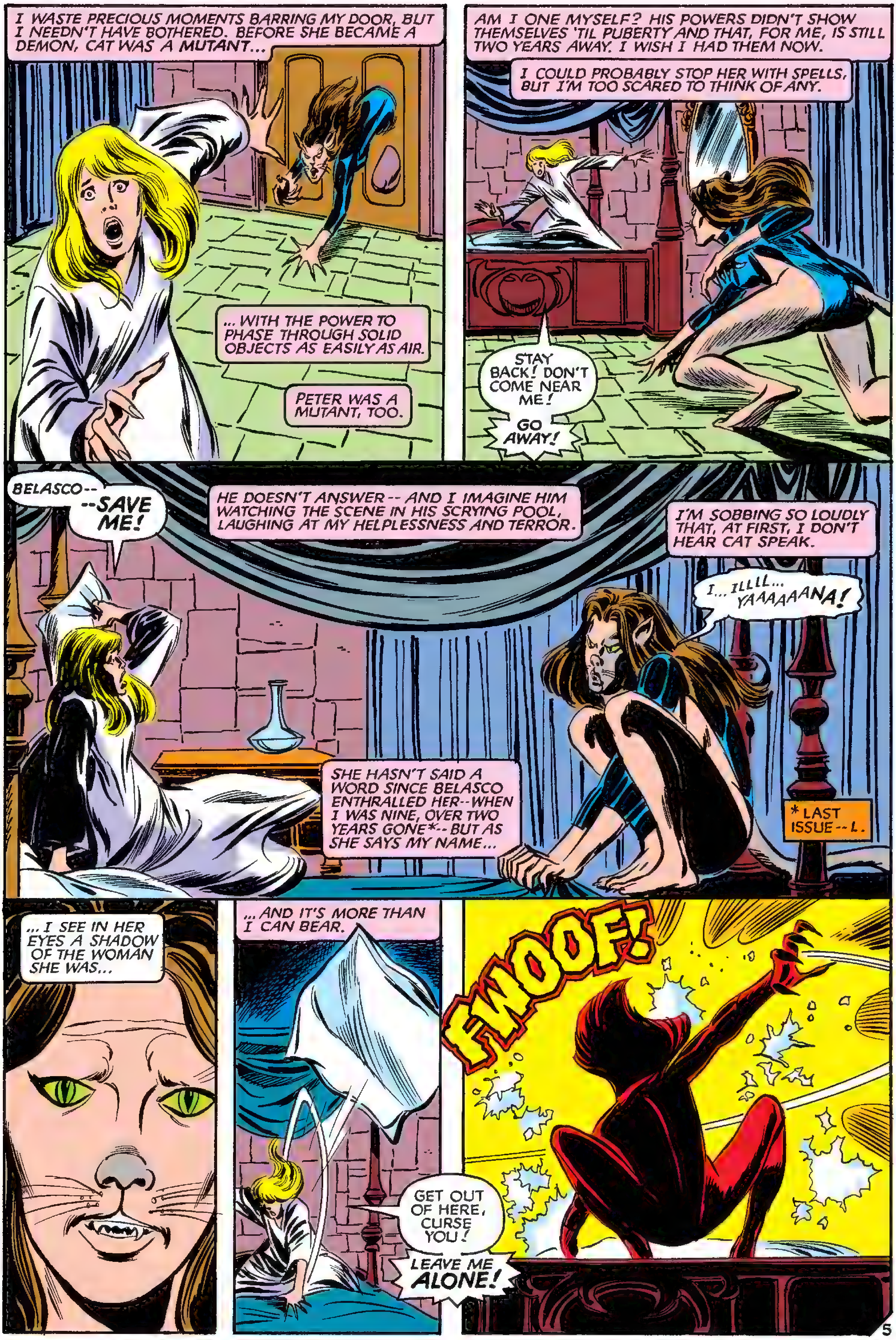
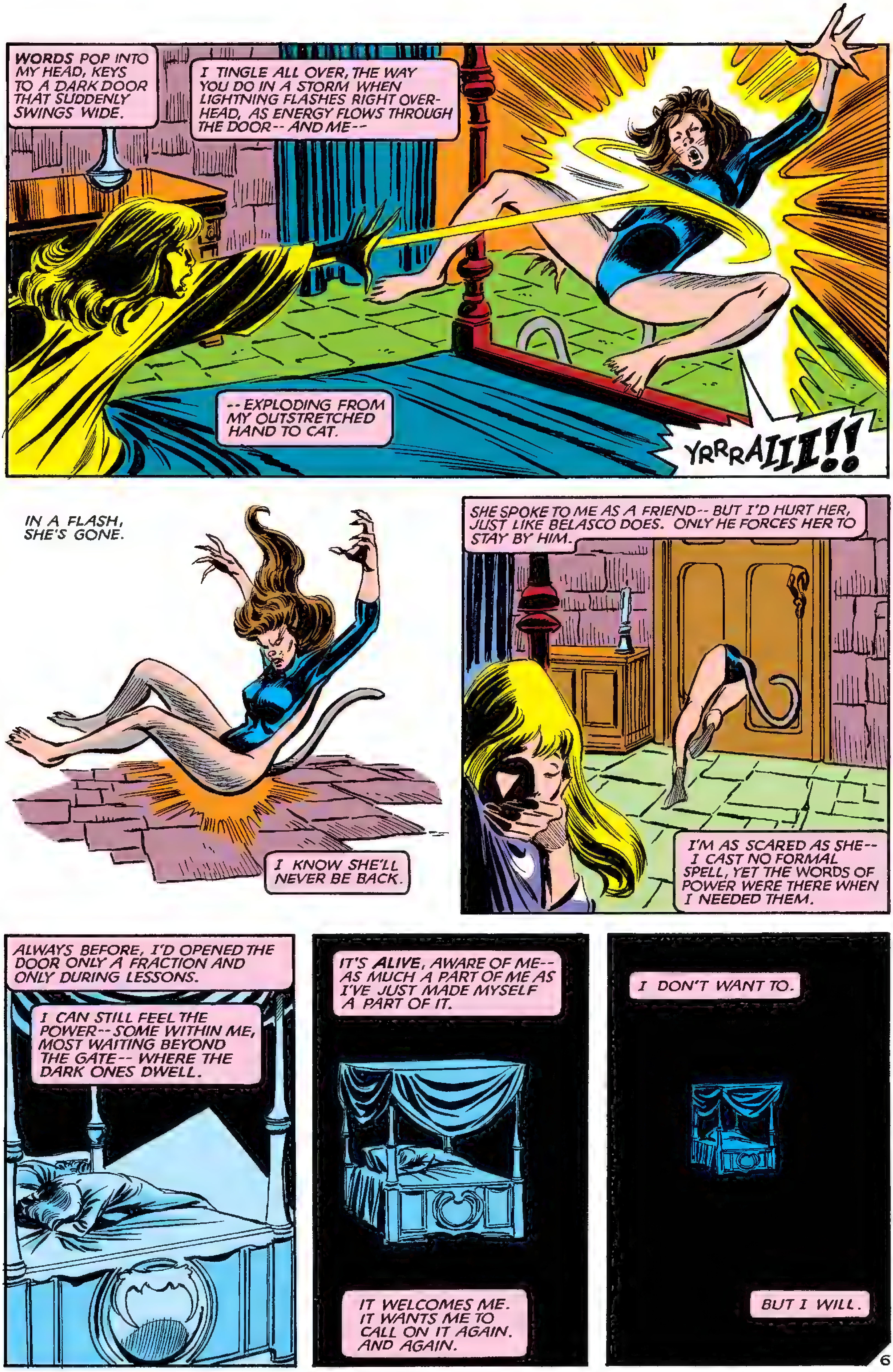
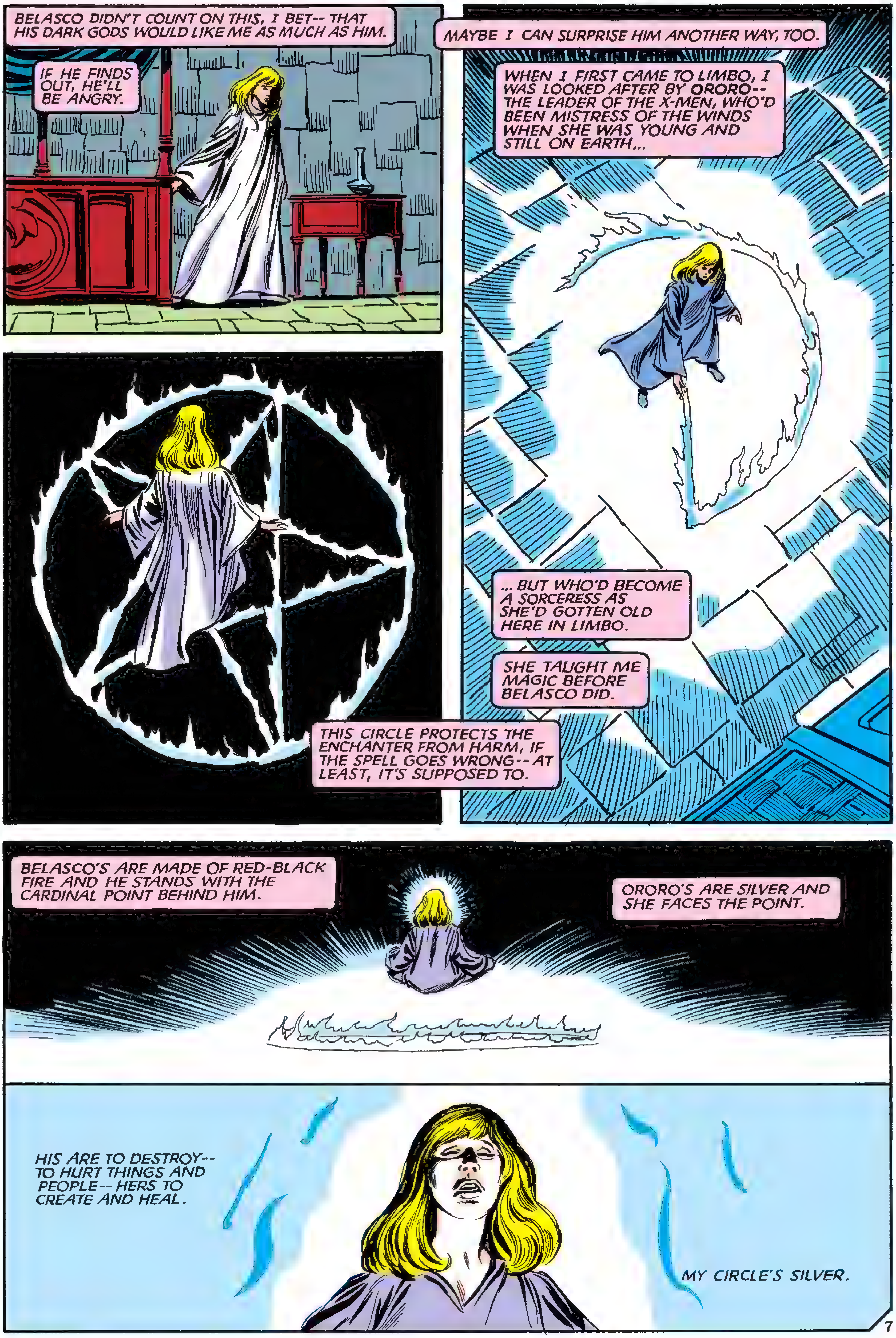

I SHALL CALL THIS LITTLE CREATURE "SQUIDGE," AFTER THE STRANGE AND DELIGHTFUL NOISES IT MAKES WHEN TALKING.
I'VE RAISED IT SINCE BIRTH--I LOVE IT--AND IT TRUSTS ME AS IT WOULD ONE OF ITS OWN KIND.
THE BEAST HAS A SIMPLE SOUL...
...EASILY SHAPED BY MY SORCERIES...
...INTO THE IMAGE OF MY OWN.
THE SQUIDGE WAS A GENTLE BEAST.
BUT NO LONGER.
IT KNOWS I'M THE CAUSE OF ITS TRANSFORMATION...
...AND LEAPS FOR MY EYES, CLAWS POISED TO RIP THEM TO SHREDS.
BELASCO--!
I YOWL WITH PAIN AS THE SQUIDGE RAKES MY CHEEK...
...BUT MANAGE TO SWAT MY PET AWAY.


THE SQUIDGE RACES FOR THE DOOR, WANTING ONLY TO FLEE AND HIDE. I'M DESPERATE TO CATCH IT-- HORRIFIED BY WHAT I'VE DONE, DETERMINED TO SET IT RIGHT. THE CASTLE IS A HUGE, CONFUSING WARREN OF PASSAGES.
IF IT GETS OUT OF BELASCO'S STUDY, I'LL NEVER FIND IT.
I NEEDN'T HAVE WORRIED.
I HADN'T REALIZED **CAT** WAS WITH US, HER SUDDEN APPEARANCE MAKES ME JUMP. IT'S BEEN YEARS SINCE HER TRANSFORMATION, BUT I'M STILL NOT USED TO HOW SHE'S CHANGED.
ONCE SHE WAS AS HUMAN AS I -- THE X-MAN, **KITTY PRYDE--**
SQUEEE
--UNTIL BELASCO'S SPELLS TWISTED HER BODY AND SOUL, AND MADE HER IN REALITY WHAT SHE WAS IN NAME.
I CAN NEVER FORGET THAT WHAT'S HAPPENED TO HER IS **MY** FAULT-- AS ARE THE DEATHS OF MOST OF HER FELLOW X-MEN, INCLUDING MY BELOVED BROTHER, **PIOTR NIKOLIEVITCH.**
THE SQUIDGE MAKES CAT A TASTY SNACK.
BUT THAT ONLY WHETS HER APPETITE.
BELASCO, I DON'T LIKE THE WAY SHE'S LOOKING AT ME.
IF YOU HAVE NO FEAR, APPRENTICE, YOU HAVE NOTHING TO FEAR.
AFTER ALL, YOU TWO WERE CLOSE FRIENDS. SURELY, SHE WOULD NOT HARM YOU.
HE'S LAUGHING AT ME-- AND TESTING ME AS WELL, MY BRAVERY VERSUS MY WILLINGNESS TO STRIKE DOWN THOSE I ONCE CARED FOR.
I'M TEMPTED TO STRIKE BUT COURAGE WINS...

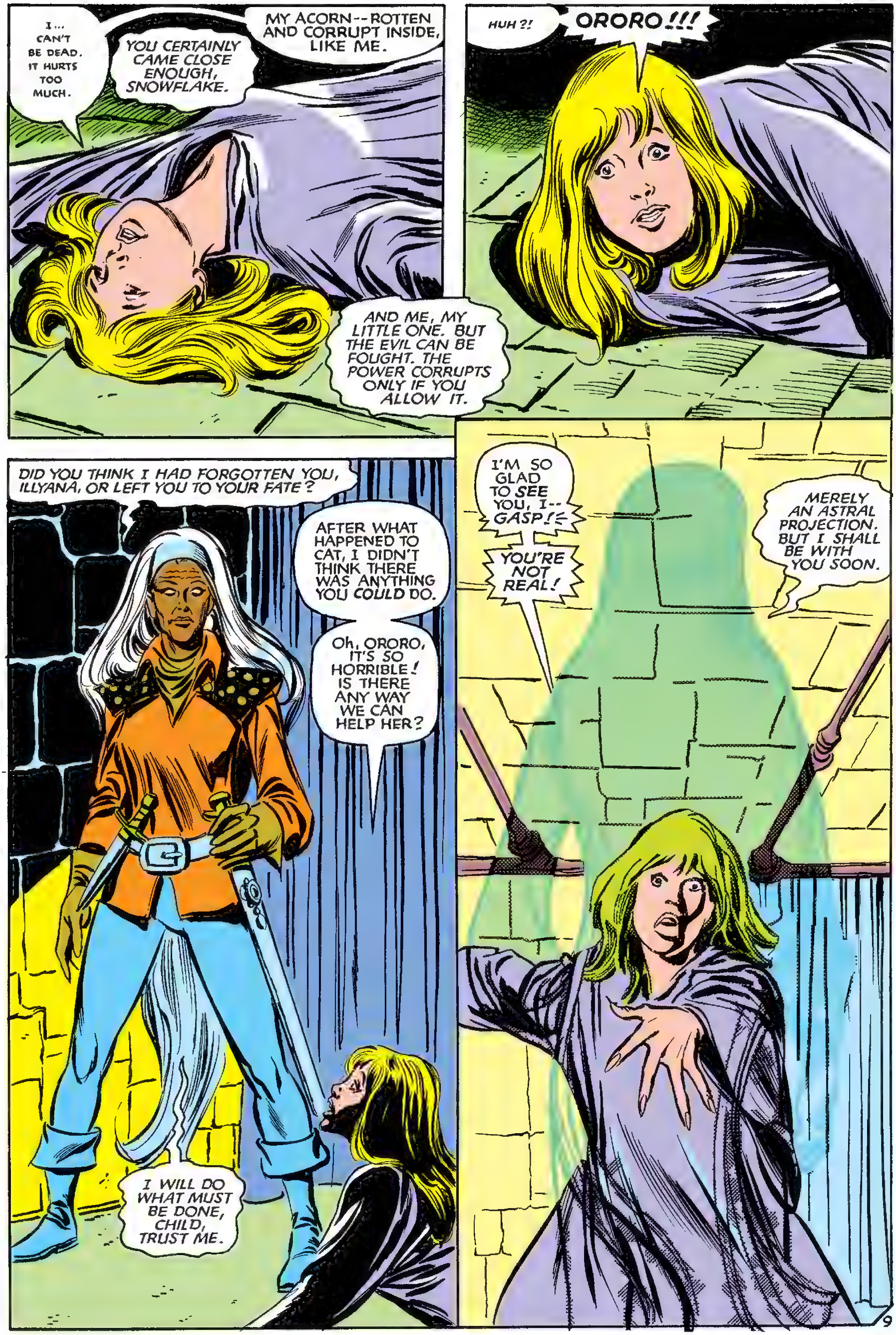

AND I STAY MY HAND.
I EXPECTED BETTER OF YOU, *ILLYANA NIKOLOVNA*. YOU MASTERED THE SOULSPELL BUT GAVE NO THOUGHT TO ITS CONSEQUENCES.
THAT FACE WOUND IS THE FAULT OF YOUR OWN OVERCONFIDENCE AND CARELESSNESS. BY RIGHTS, I SHOULD MAKE YOU WEAR THE SCARS FOREVER, AS A REMINDER.
FOR NOW, CAST A HEALING ENCHANTMENT, LEST THE SIGHT OF BLOOD INCITE CAT BEYOND ALL RESTRAINT.
I... I'M SORRY, BELASCO. I'LL DO BETTER NEXT TIME.
OF COURSE YOU WILL.
RETIRE TO YOUR BEDCHAMBER, CHILD. MEDITATE ON TODAY'S LESSON, AND PREPARE YOURSELF FOR TOMORROW.
MY VAUNTED COURAGE LASTS--
-- UNTIL CAT SHOWS HER TEETH--
--AND THEN, I RUN FOR MY LIFE, FASTER THAN THE SQUIDGE...
...WITH CAT HOT ON MY HEELS.
IF SHE CATCHES ME, I'M CERTAIN I'LL SHARE MY PET'S FATE. I WONDER HOW MUCH IT'LL HURT. I THINK HOW EASY IT WOULD BE TO SLOW MY PACE A STEP OR TWO AND LET HER DO IT.
BUT I'VE SEEN BELASCO RAISE THE DEAD, AND SO I RUN ALL THE MORE QUICKLY.

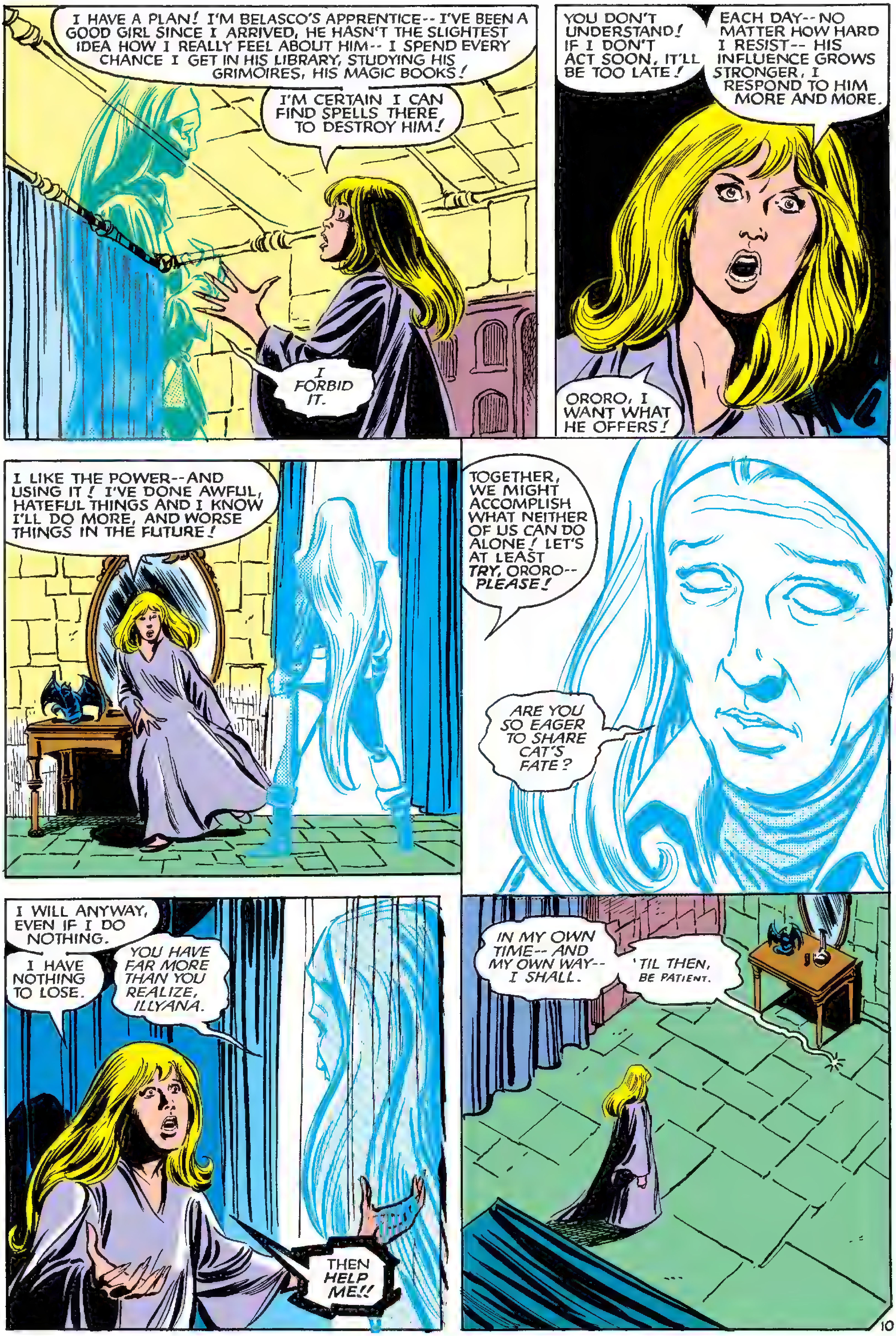

I WASTE PRECIOUS MOMENTS BARRING MY DOOR, BUT I NEEDN'T HAVE BOTHERED. BEFORE SHE BECAME A DEMON, CAT WAS A MUTANT...
...WITH THE POWER TO PHASE THROUGH SOLID OBJECTS AS EASILY AS AIR.
PETER WAS A MUTANT, TOO.
AM I ONE MYSELF? HIS POWERS DIDN'T SHOW THEMSELVES 'TIL PUBERTY AND THAT, FOR ME, IS STILL TWO YEARS AWAY. I WISH I HAD THEM NOW.
I COULD PROBABLY STOP HER WITH SPELLS, BUT I'M TOO SCARED TO THINK OF ANY.
STAY BACK! DON'T COME NEAR ME!
GO AWAY!
BELASCO-- --SAVE ME!
HE DOESN'T ANSWER -- AND I IMAGINE HIM WATCHING THE SCENE IN HIS SCRYING POOL, LAUGHING AT MY HELPLESSNESS AND TERROR.
I'M SOBBING SO LOUDLY THAT, AT FIRST, I DON'T HEAR CAT SPEAK.
I... ILLLL... YAAAAAANA!
SHE HASN'T SAID A WORD SINCE BELASCO ENTHRALLED HER--WHEN I WAS NINE, OVER TWO YEARS GONE*--BUT AS SHE SAYS MY NAME...
* LAST ISSUE -- L.
...I SEE IN HER EYES A SHADOW OF THE WOMAN SHE WAS...
...AND IT'S MORE THAN I CAN BEAR.
GET OUT OF HERE, CURSE YOU!
LEAVE ME ALONE!
FWOOF!

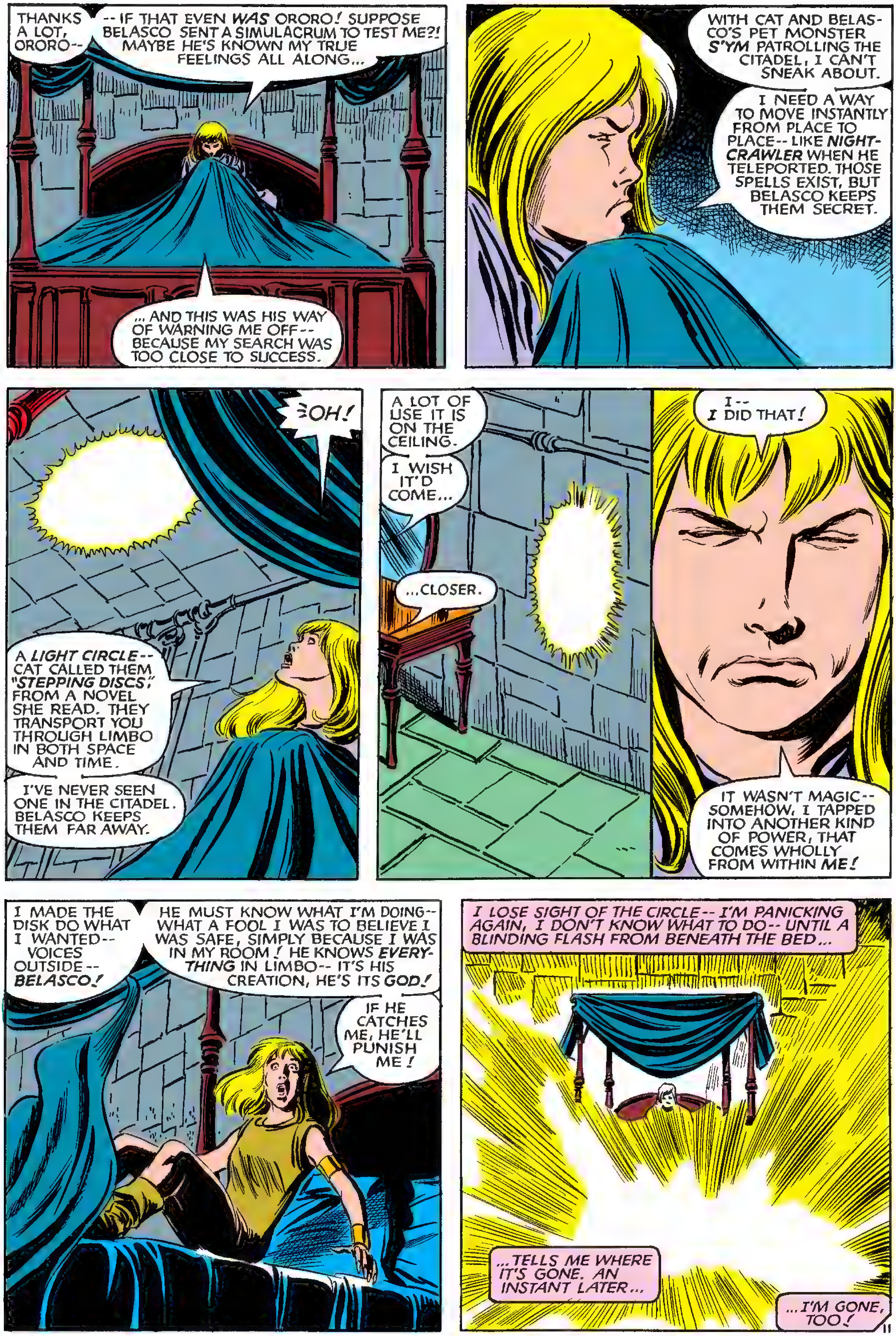

WORDS POP INTO MY HEAD, KEYS TO A DARK DOOR THAT SUDDENLY SWINGS WIDE.
I TINGLE ALL OVER, THE WAY YOU DO IN A STORM WHEN LIGHTNING FLASHES RIGHT OVERHEAD, AS ENERGY FLOWS THROUGH THE DOOR-- AND ME--
--EXPLODING FROM MY OUTSTRETCHED HAND TO CAT.
YRRRAIII!!
IN A FLASH, SHE'S GONE.
I KNOW SHE'LL NEVER BE BACK.
SHE SPOKE TO ME AS A FRIEND-- BUT I'D HURT HER, JUST LIKE BELASCO DOES. ONLY HE FORCES HER TO STAY BY HIM.
I'M AS SCARED AS SHE-- I CAST NO FORMAL SPELL, YET THE WORDS OF POWER WERE THERE WHEN I NEEDED THEM.
ALWAYS BEFORE, I'D OPENED THE DOOR ONLY A FRACTION AND ONLY DURING LESSONS.
I CAN STILL FEEL THE POWER-- SOME WITHIN ME, MOST WAITING BEYOND THE GATE-- WHERE THE DARK ONES DWELL.
IT'S ALIVE, AWARE OF ME-- AS MUCH A PART OF ME AS I'VE JUST MADE MYSELF A PART OF IT.
IT WELCOMES ME. IT WANTS ME TO CALL ON IT AGAIN. AND AGAIN.
I DON'T WANT TO.
BUT I WILL.

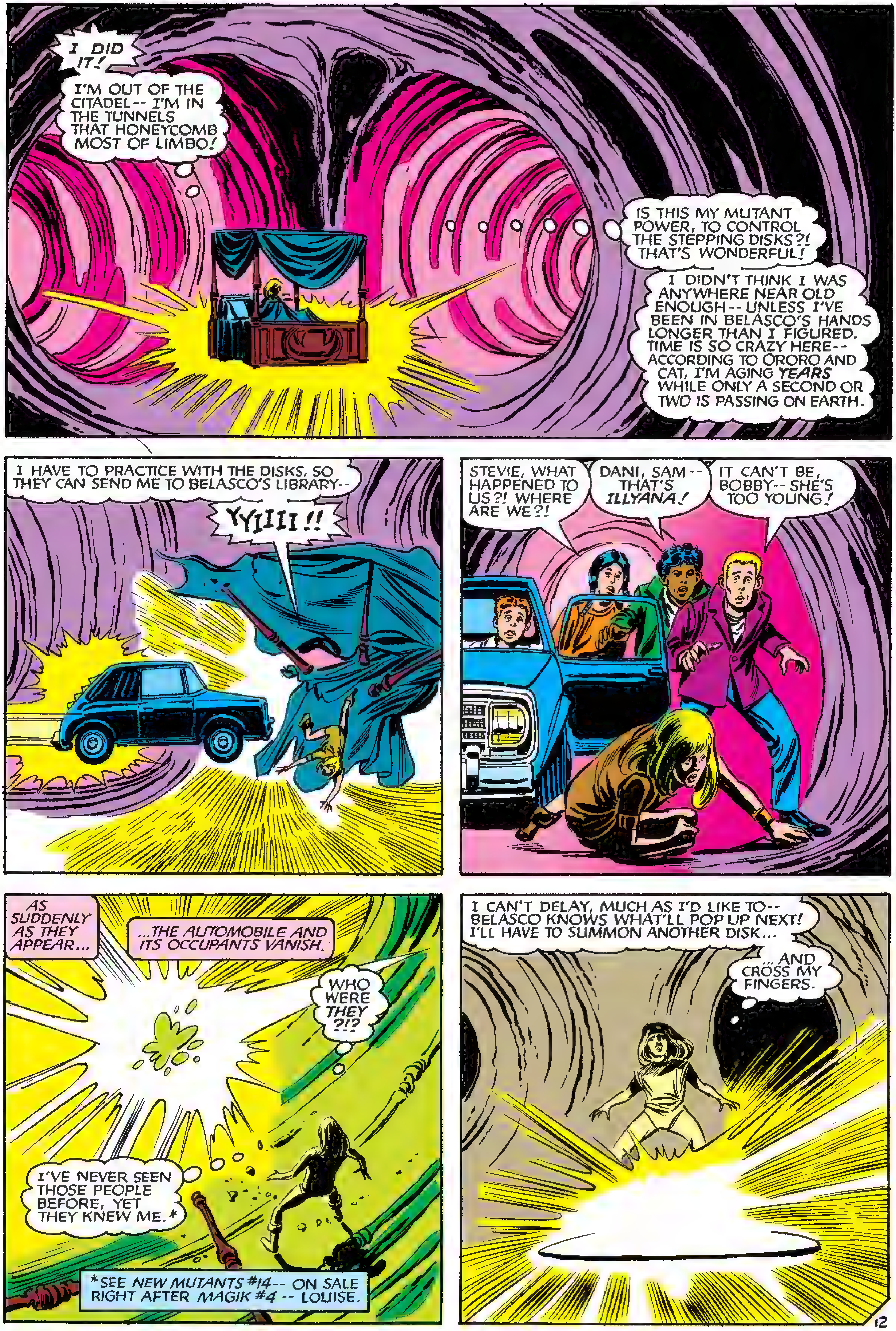

BELASCO DIDN'T COUNT ON THIS, I BET-- THAT HIS DARK GODS WOULD LIKE ME AS MUCH AS HIM.
IF HE FINDS OUT, HE'LL BE ANGRY.
MAYBE I CAN SURPRISE HIM ANOTHER WAY, TOO.
WHEN I FIRST CAME TO LIMBO, I WAS LOOKED AFTER BY ORORO-- THE LEADER OF THE X-MEN, WHO'D BEEN MISTRESS OF THE WINDS WHEN SHE WAS YOUNG AND STILL ON EARTH...
... BUT WHO'D BECOME A SORCERESS AS SHE'D GOTTEN OLD HERE IN LIMBO.
SHE TAUGHT ME MAGIC BEFORE BELASCO DID.
THIS CIRCLE PROTECTS THE ENCHANTER FROM HARM, IF THE SPELL GOES WRONG-- AT LEAST, IT'S SUPPOSED TO.
BELASCO'S ARE MADE OF RED-BLACK FIRE AND HE STANDS WITH THE CARDINAL POINT BEHIND HIM.
ORORO'S ARE SILVER AND SHE FACES THE POINT.
HIS ARE TO DESTROY-- TO HURT THINGS AND PEOPLE-- HERS TO CREATE AND HEAL.
MY CIRCLE'S SILVER.

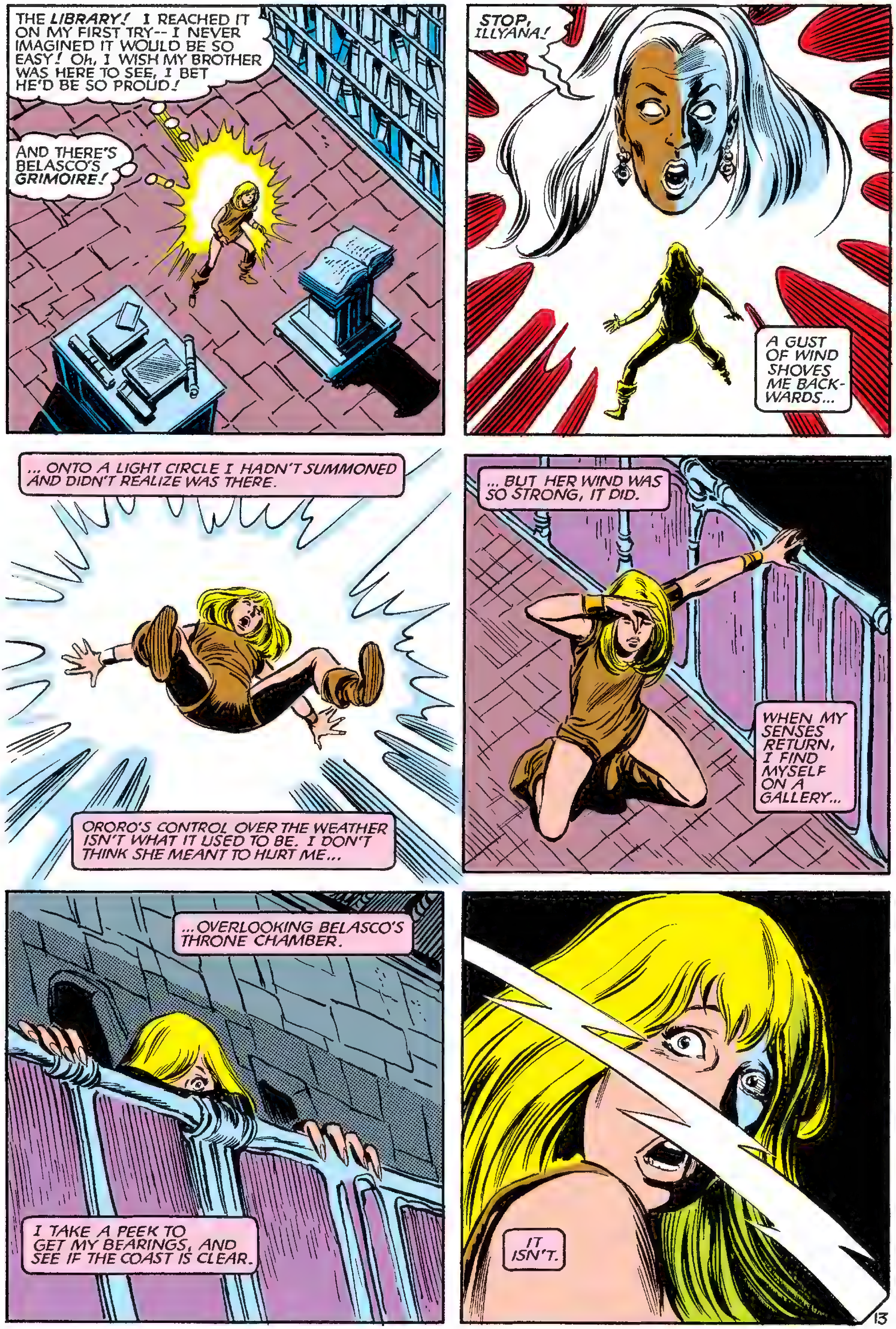
I RELAX, TRYING TO SENSE EVERY PART OF MY BODY-- NOT MERELY FINGERS AND TOES, BUT EACH INDIVIDUAL MOLECULE!
THEN, I TAKE A LITTLE PART OF MYSELF...
... AND GATHER TO IT OTHER MOLECULES AND ELEMENTS-- OUT OF THE VERY AIR.
COMPARED TO THIS, WHAT I DID TO MY POOR SQUIDGE WAS NOTHING. BUT ORORO SAID DESTRUCTION IS ALWAYS EASIER THAN CREATION.
HER ULTIMATE TEST-- THE THING SHE'S MOST PROUD OF, THAT SIGNIFIED HER WINNING HER FREEDOM FROM BELASCO--
--WAS THE CREATION OF AN ACORN.
I WONDER WHERE I'LL PLANT MINE.

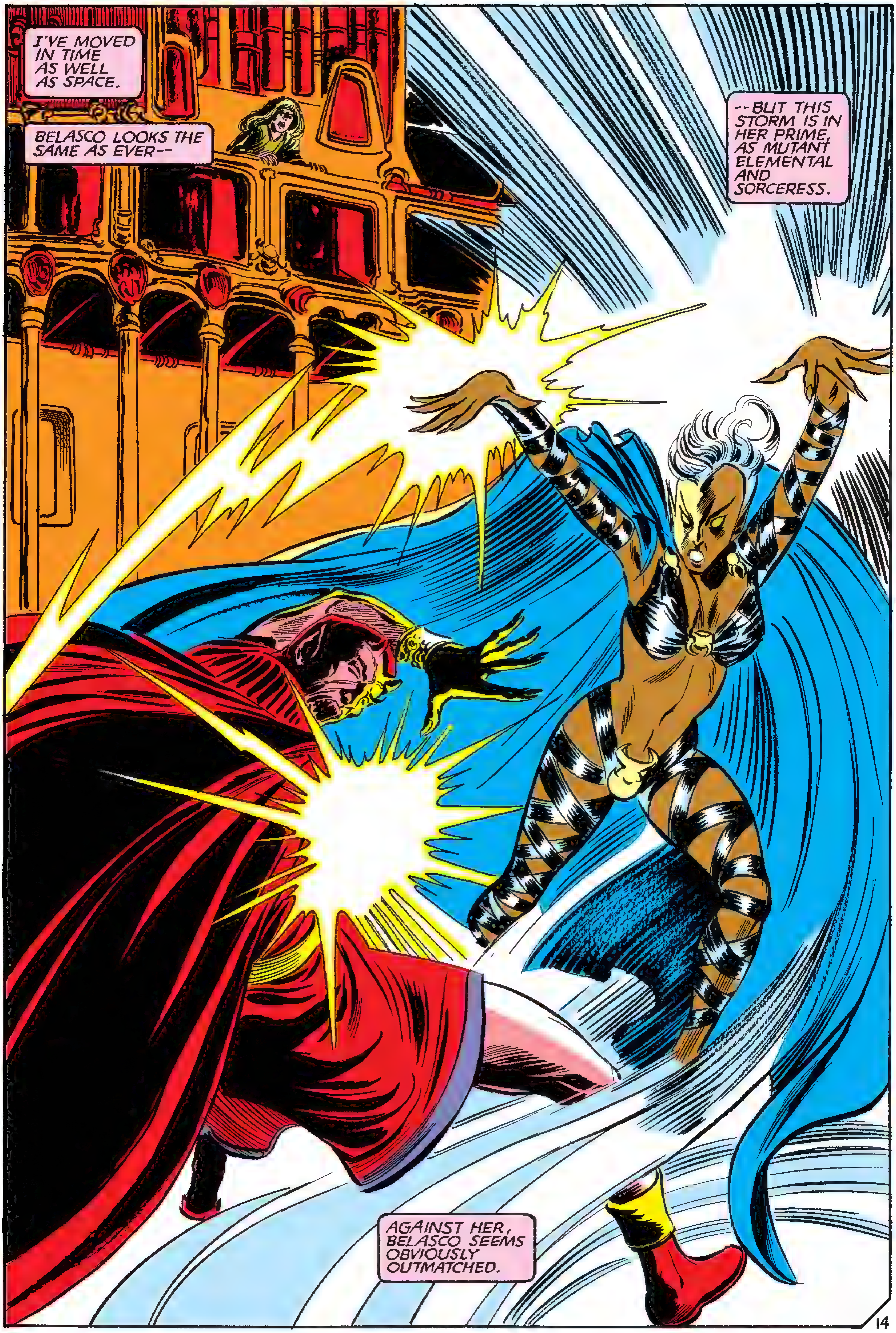

I... CAN'T BE DEAD. IT HURTS TOO MUCH.
YOU CERTAINLY CAME CLOSE ENOUGH, SNOWFLAKE.
MY ACORN--ROTTEN AND CORRUPT INSIDE, LIKE ME.
AND ME, MY LITTLE ONE. BUT THE EVIL CAN BE FOUGHT. THE POWER CORRUPTS ONLY IF YOU ALLOW IT.
HUH?!
ORORO!!!
I'M SO GLAD TO SEE YOU, I-- GASP!
YOU'RE NOT REAL!
MERELY AN ASTRAL PROJECTION. BUT I SHALL BE WITH YOU SOON.
DID YOU THINK I HAD FORGOTTEN YOU, ILLYANA, OR LEFT YOU TO YOUR FATE?
AFTER WHAT HAPPENED TO CAT, I DIDN'T THINK THERE WAS ANYTHING YOU COULD DO.
Oh, ORORO, IT'S SO HORRIBLE! IS THERE ANY WAY WE CAN HELP HER?
I WILL DO WHAT MUST BE DONE, CHILD, TRUST ME.

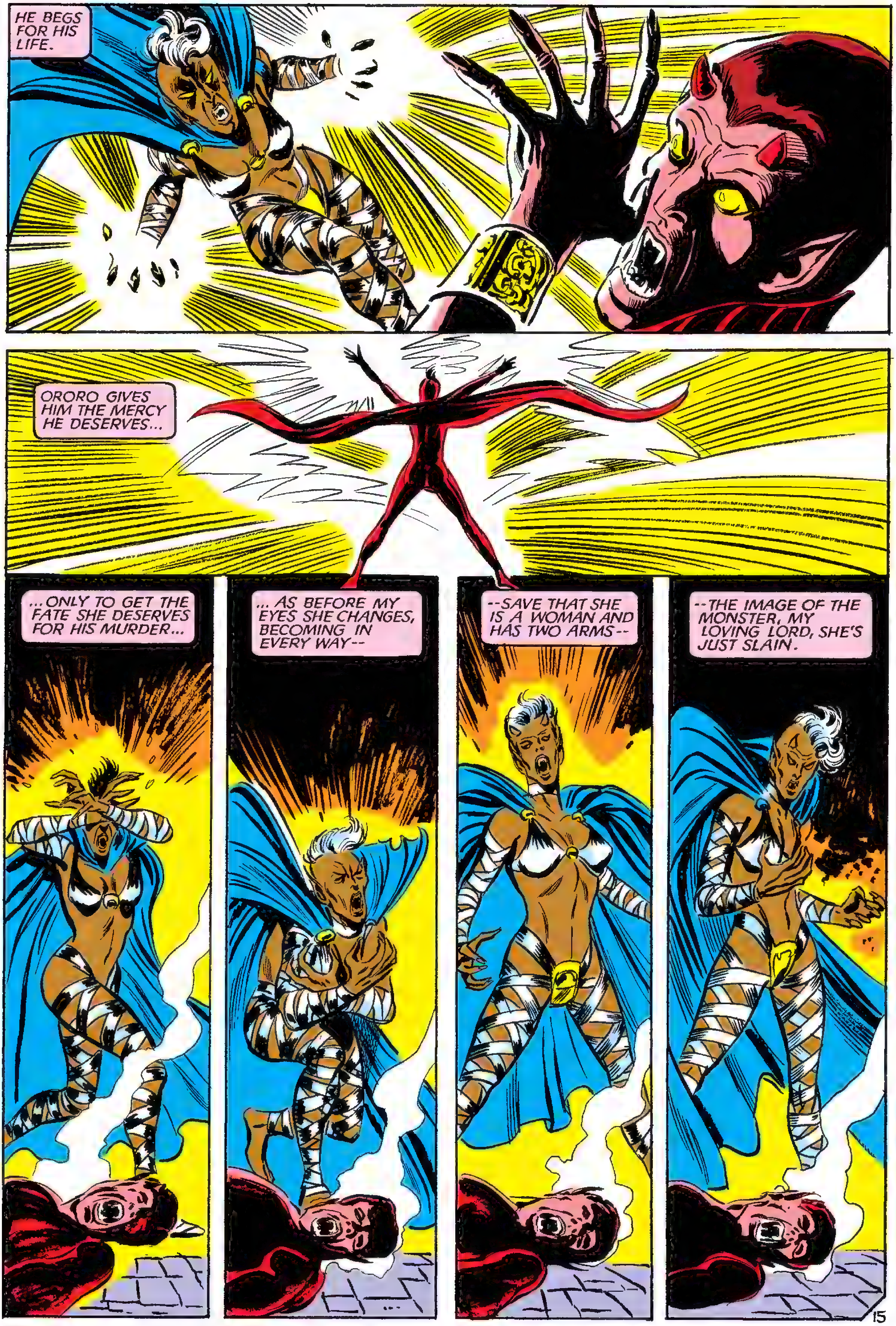

I HAVE A PLAN! I'M BELASCO'S APPRENTICE-- I'VE BEEN A GOOD GIRL SINCE I ARRIVED, HE HASN'T THE SLIGHTEST IDEA HOW I REALLY FEEL ABOUT HIM-- I SPEND EVERY CHANCE I GET IN HIS LIBRARY, STUDYING HIS GRIMOIRES, HIS MAGIC BOOKS!
I'M CERTAIN I CAN FIND SPELLS THERE TO DESTROY HIM!
I FORBID IT.
YOU DON'T UNDERSTAND! IF I DON'T ACT SOON, IT'LL BE TOO LATE!
EACH DAY-- NO MATTER HOW HARD I RESIST-- HIS INFLUENCE GROWS STRONGER, I RESPOND TO HIM MORE AND MORE.
ORORO, I WANT WHAT HE OFFERS!
I LIKE THE POWER--AND USING IT! I'VE DONE AWFUL, HATEFUL THINGS AND I KNOW I'LL DO MORE, AND WORSE THINGS IN THE FUTURE!
TOGETHER, WE MIGHT ACCOMPLISH WHAT NEITHER OF US CAN DO ALONE! LET'S AT LEAST *TRY*, ORORO-- *PLEASE!*
ARE YOU SO EAGER TO SHARE CAT'S FATE?
I WILL ANYWAY, EVEN IF I DO NOTHING.
I HAVE NOTHING TO LOSE.
YOU HAVE FAR MORE THAN YOU REALIZE, ILLYANA.
THEN *HELP ME!!*
IN MY OWN TIME-- AND MY OWN WAY-- I SHALL.
'TIL THEN, BE PATIENT.

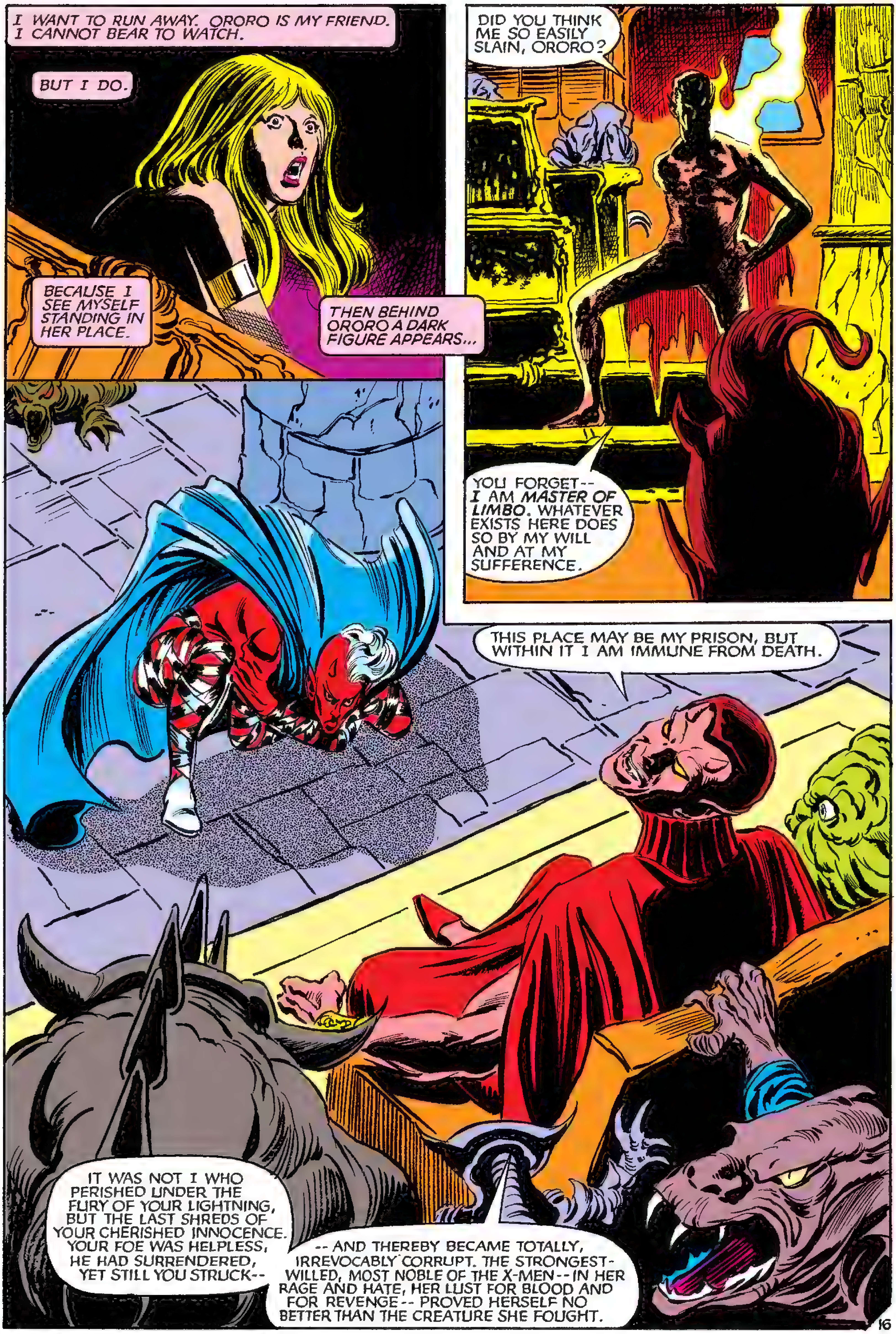

THANKS A LOT, ORORO--
--IF THAT EVEN WAS ORORO! SUPPOSE BELASCO SENT A SIMULACRUM TO TEST ME?! MAYBE HE'S KNOWN MY TRUE FEELINGS ALL ALONG...
...AND THIS WAS HIS WAY OF WARNING ME OFF--BECAUSE MY SEARCH WAS TOO CLOSE TO SUCCESS.
WITH CAT AND BELASCO'S PET MONSTER S'YM PATROLLING THE CITADEL, I CAN'T SNEAK ABOUT.
I NEED A WAY TO MOVE INSTANTLY FROM PLACE TO PLACE--LIKE NIGHTCRAWLER WHEN HE TELEPORTED. THOSE SPELLS EXIST, BUT BELASCO KEEPS THEM SECRET.
OH!
A LIGHT CIRCLE--CAT CALLED THEM "STEPPING DISCS," FROM A NOVEL SHE READ. THEY TRANSPORT YOU THROUGH LIMBO IN BOTH SPACE AND TIME.
I'VE NEVER SEEN ONE IN THE CITADEL. BELASCO KEEPS THEM FAR AWAY.
A LOT OF USE IT IS ON THE CEILING.
I WISH IT'D COME...
...CLOSER.
I--I DID THAT!
IT WASN'T MAGIC--SOMEHOW, I TAPPED INTO ANOTHER KIND OF POWER, THAT COMES WHOLLY FROM WITHIN ME!
I MADE THE DISK DO WHAT I WANTED--VOICES OUTSIDE--BELASCO!
HE MUST KNOW WHAT I'M DOING--WHAT A FOOL I WAS TO BELIEVE I WAS SAFE, SIMPLY BECAUSE I WAS IN MY ROOM! HE KNOWS EVERYTHING IN LIMBO--IT'S HIS CREATION, HE'S ITS GOD!
IF HE CATCHES ME, HE'LL PUNISH ME!
I LOSE SIGHT OF THE CIRCLE--I'M PANICKING AGAIN, I DON'T KNOW WHAT TO DO--UNTIL A BLINDING FLASH FROM BENEATH THE BED...
...TELLS ME WHERE IT'S GONE. AN INSTANT LATER...
...I'M GONE, TOO!

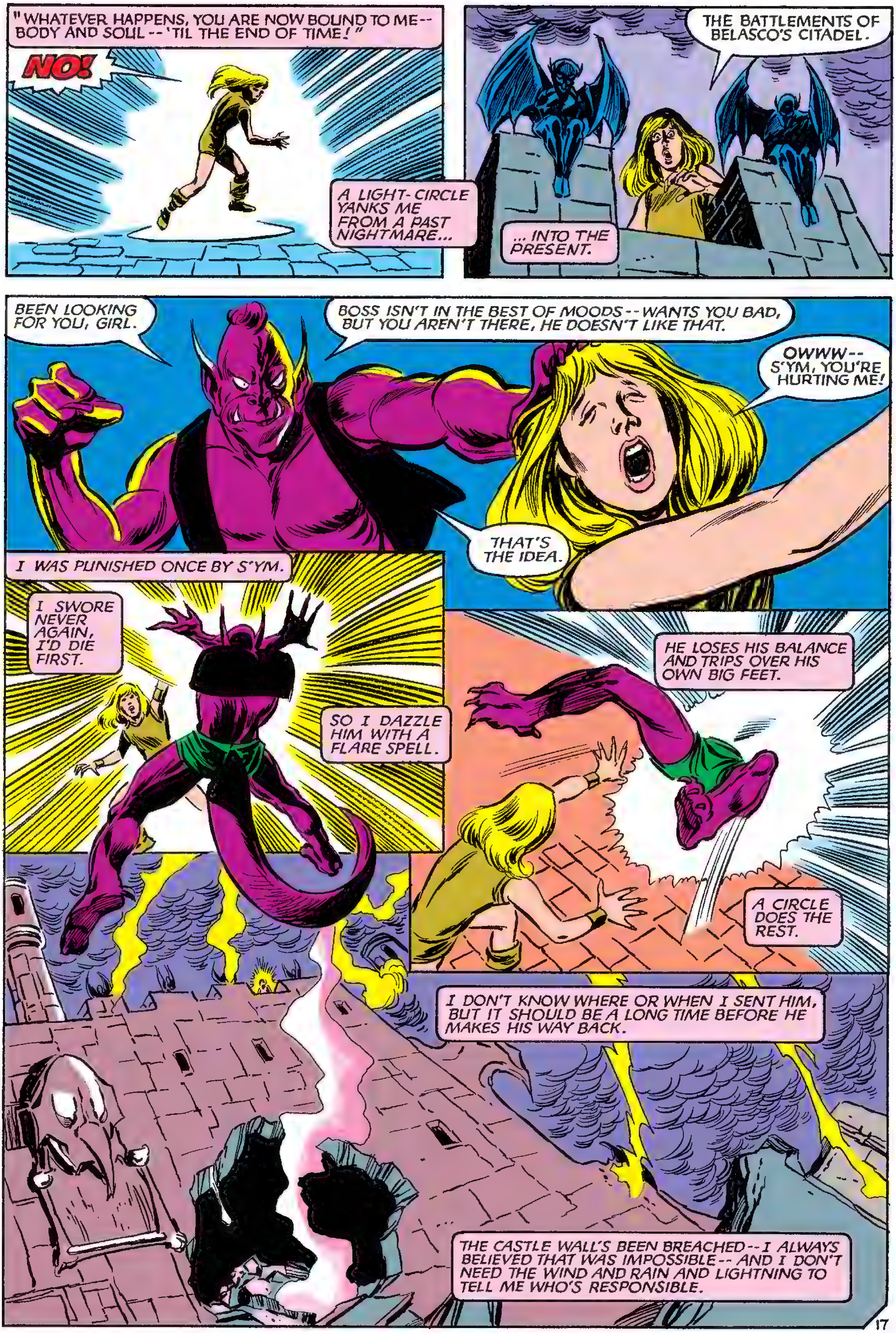

I DID IT!
I'M OUT OF THE CITADEL -- I'M IN THE TUNNELS THAT HONEYCOMB MOST OF LIMBO!
IS THIS MY MUTANT POWER, TO CONTROL THE STEPPING DISKS?! THAT'S WONDERFUL!
I DIDN'T THINK I WAS ANYWHERE NEAR OLD ENOUGH -- UNLESS I'VE BEEN IN BELASCO'S HANDS LONGER THAN I FIGURED. TIME IS SO CRAZY HERE -- ACCORDING TO ORORO AND CAT, I'M AGING *YEARS* WHILE ONLY A SECOND OR TWO IS PASSING ON EARTH.
I HAVE TO PRACTICE WITH THE DISKS, SO THEY CAN SEND ME TO BELASCO'S LIBRARY --
YYIIII!!
STEVIE, WHAT HAPPENED TO US?! WHERE ARE WE?!
DANI, SAM -- THAT'S *ILLYANA!*
IT CAN'T BE, BOBBY -- SHE'S TOO YOUNG!
AS SUDDENLY AS THEY APPEAR...
...THE AUTOMOBILE AND ITS OCCUPANTS VANISH.
WHO WERE THEY ?!?
I'VE NEVER SEEN THOSE PEOPLE BEFORE, YET THEY KNEW ME.*
*SEE *NEW MUTANTS* #14 -- ON SALE RIGHT AFTER *MAGIK* #4 -- LOUISE.
I CAN'T DELAY, MUCH AS I'D LIKE TO -- BELASCO KNOWS WHAT'LL POP UP NEXT! I'LL HAVE TO SUMMON ANOTHER DISK...
... AND CROSS MY FINGERS.

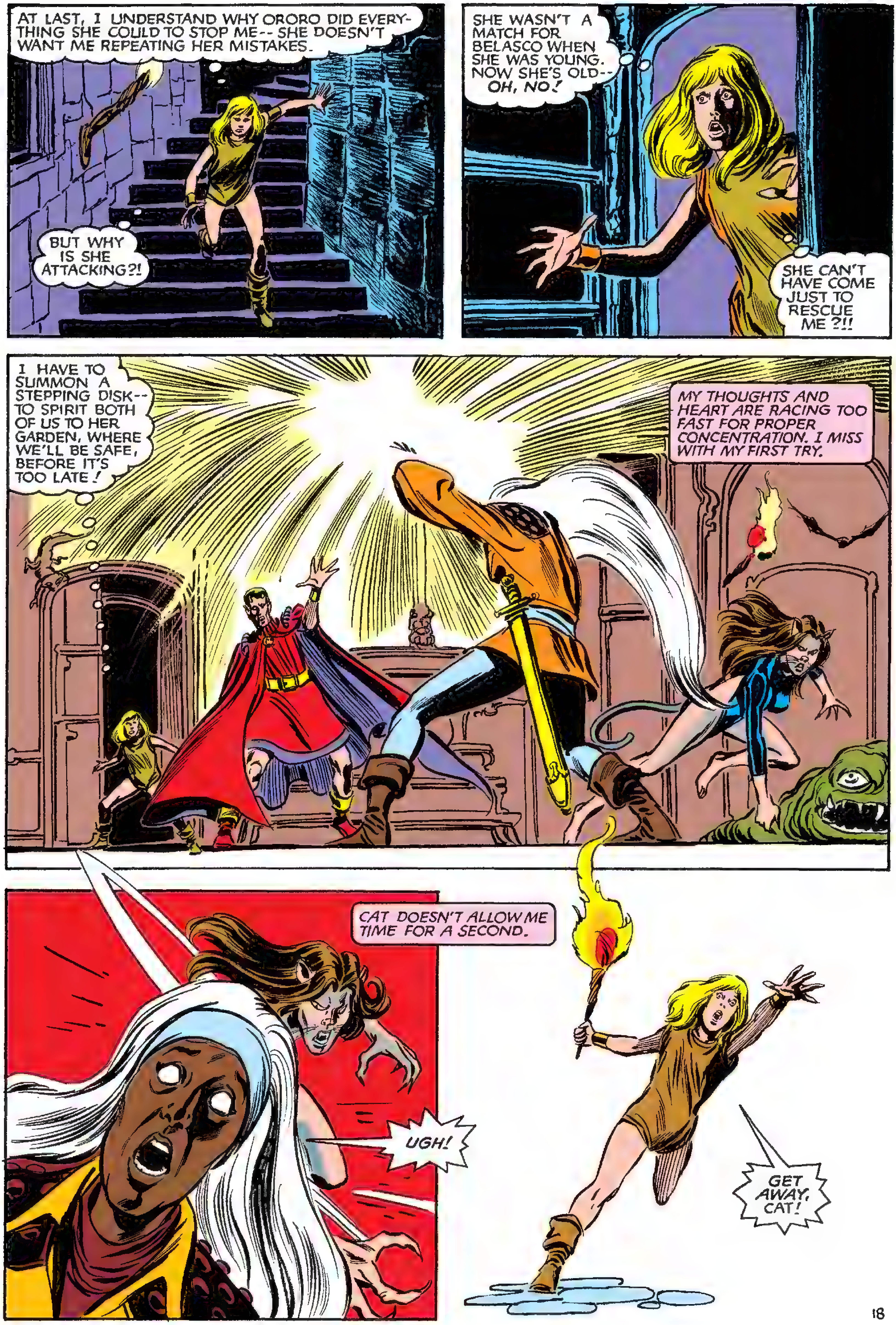

THE *LIBRARY!* I REACHED IT ON MY FIRST TRY-- I NEVER IMAGINED IT WOULD BE SO EASY! *Oh,* I WISH MY BROTHER WAS HERE TO SEE, I BET HE'D BE SO PROUD!
AND THERE'S BELASCO'S *GRIMOIRE!*
STOP, ILLYANA!
A GUST OF WIND SHOVES ME BACKWARDS...
... ONTO A LIGHT CIRCLE I HADN'T SUMMONED AND DIDN'T REALIZE WAS THERE.
ORORO'S CONTROL OVER THE WEATHER ISN'T WHAT IT USED TO BE. I DON'T THINK SHE MEANT TO HURT ME...
... BUT HER WIND WAS SO STRONG, IT DID.
WHEN MY SENSES RETURN, I FIND MYSELF ON A GALLERY...
...OVERLOOKING BELASCO'S THRONE CHAMBER.
I TAKE A PEEK TO GET MY BEARINGS, AND SEE IF THE COAST IS CLEAR.
IT ISN'T.

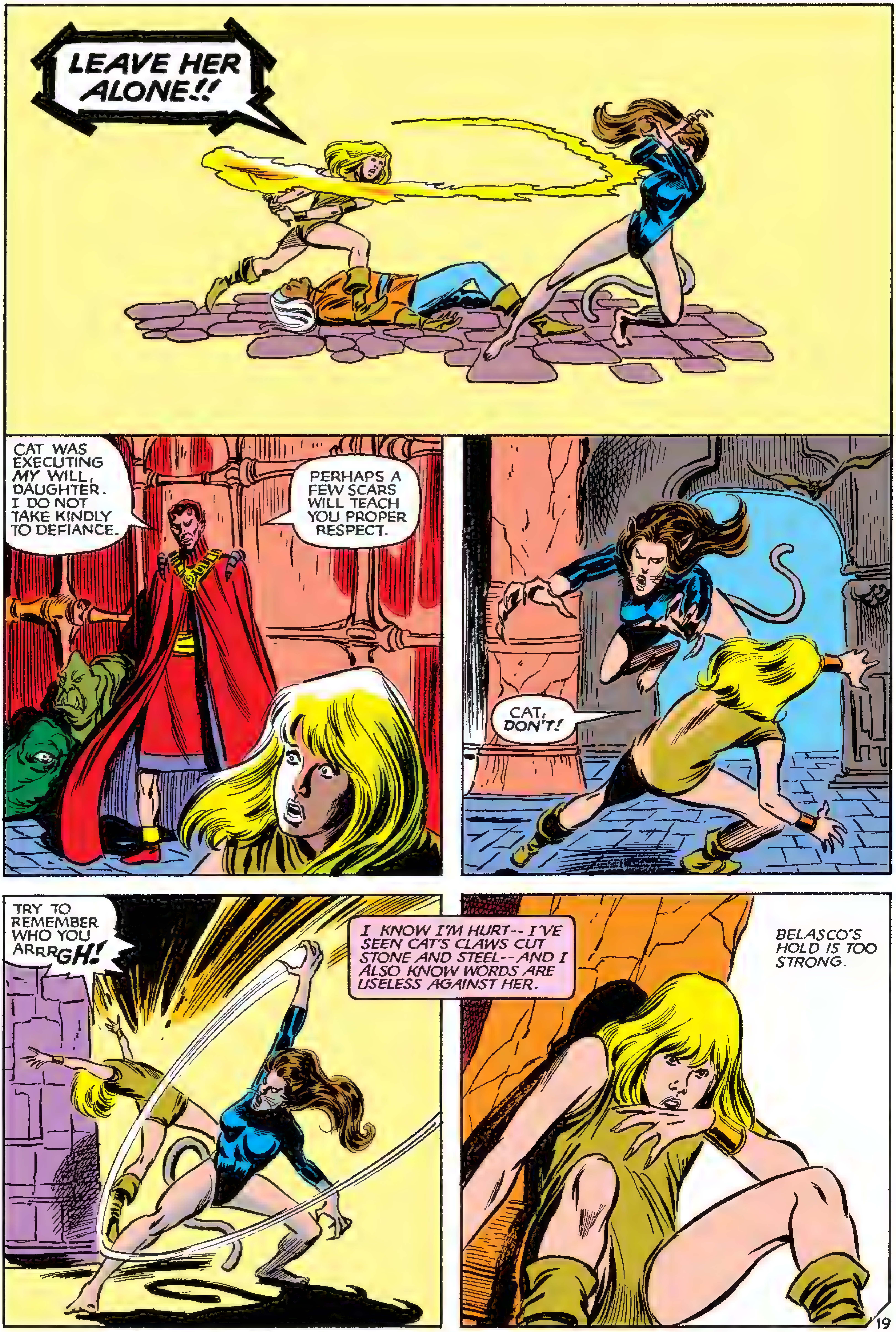

I'VE MOVED IN TIME AS WELL AS SPACE.
BELASCO LOOKS THE SAME AS EVER--
--BUT THIS STORM IS IN HER PRIME, AS MUTANT ELEMENTAL AND SORCERESS.
AGAINST HER, BELASCO SEEMS OBVIOUSLY OUTMATCHED.

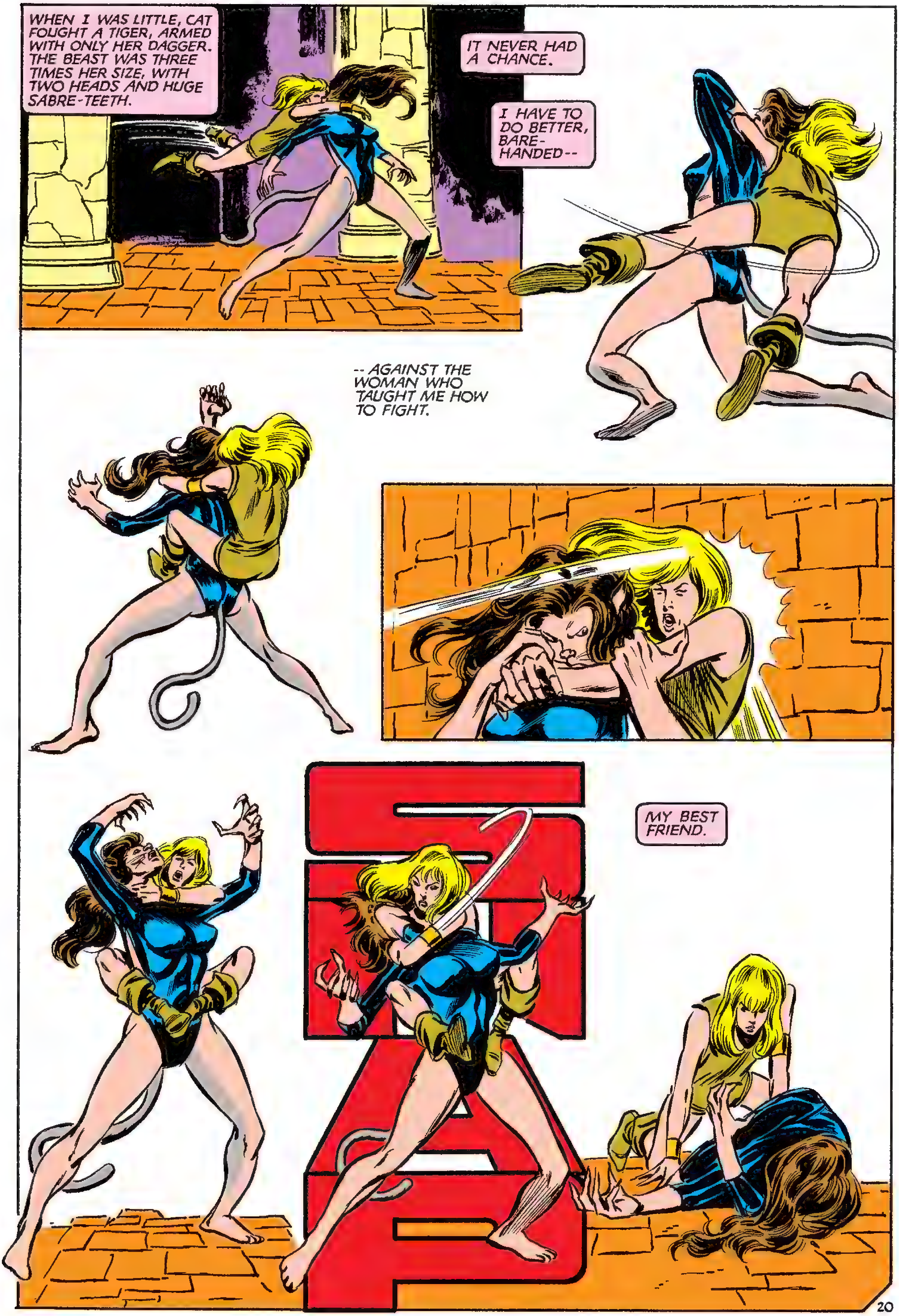

HE BEGS FOR HIS LIFE.
ORORO GIVES HIM THE MERCY HE DESERVES...
...ONLY TO GET THE FATE SHE DESERVES FOR HIS MURDER...
...AS BEFORE MY EYES SHE CHANGES, BECOMING IN EVERY WAY--
--SAVE THAT SHE IS A WOMAN AND HAS TWO ARMS--
--THE IMAGE OF THE MONSTER, MY LOVING LORD, SHE'S JUST SLAIN.

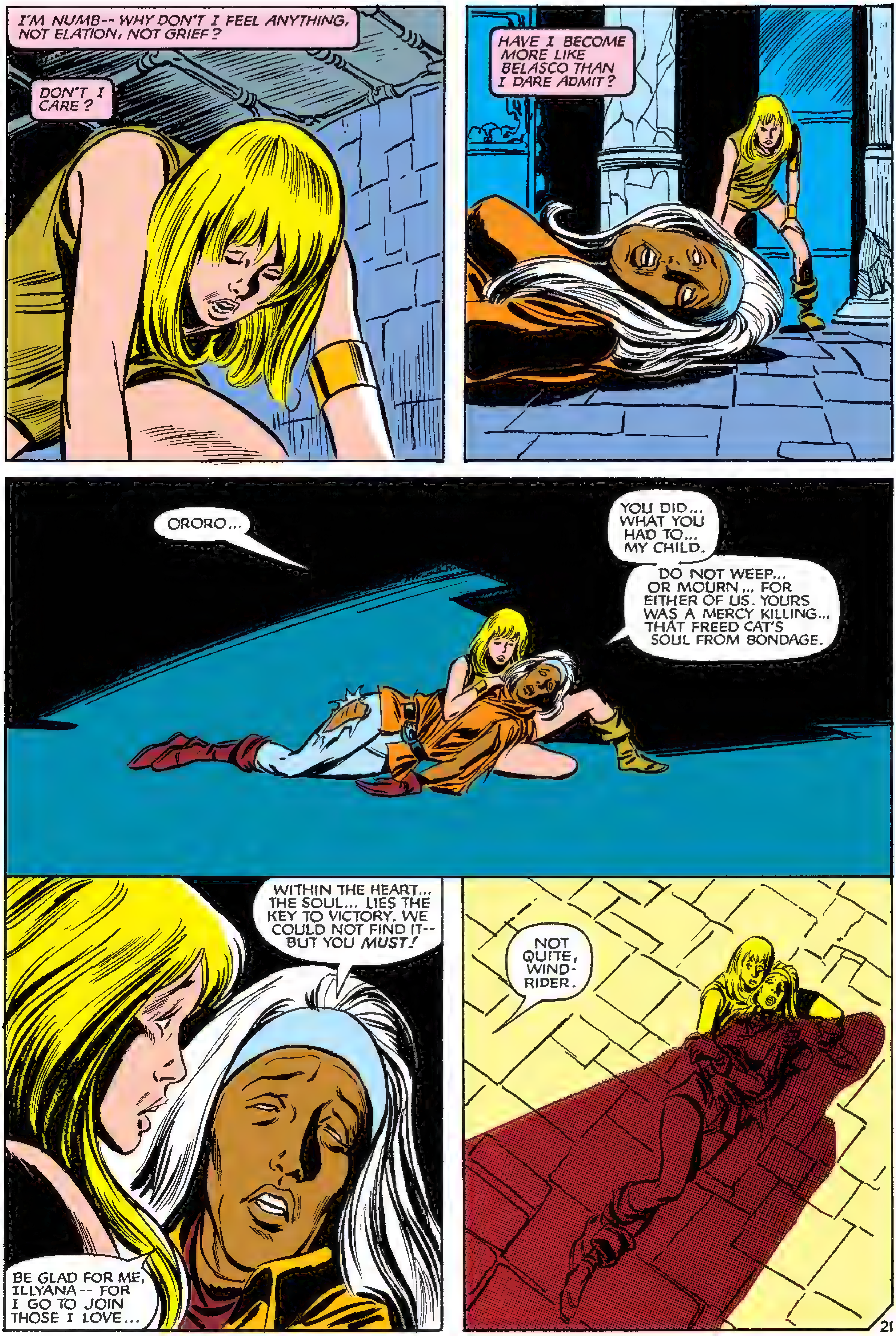

I WANT TO RUN AWAY. ORORO IS MY FRIEND. I CANNOT BEAR TO WATCH.
BUT I DO.
BECAUSE I SEE MYSELF STANDING IN HER PLACE.
THEN BEHIND ORORO A DARK FIGURE APPEARS...
DID YOU THINK ME SO EASILY SLAIN, ORORO?
YOU FORGET-- I AM **MASTER OF LIMBO**. WHATEVER EXISTS HERE DOES SO BY MY WILL AND AT MY SUFFERENCE.
THIS PLACE MAY BE MY PRISON, BUT WITHIN IT I AM IMMUNE FROM DEATH.
IT WAS NOT I WHO PERISHED UNDER THE FURY OF YOUR LIGHTNING, BUT THE LAST SHREDS OF YOUR CHERISHED INNOCENCE. YOUR FOE WAS HELPLESS, HE HAD SURRENDERED, YET STILL YOU STRUCK--
-- AND THEREBY BECAME TOTALLY, IRREVOCABLY CORRUPT. THE STRONGEST-WILLED, MOST NOBLE OF THE X-MEN -- IN HER RAGE AND HATE, HER LUST FOR BLOOD AND FOR REVENGE -- PROVED HERSELF NO BETTER THAN THE CREATURE SHE FOUGHT.

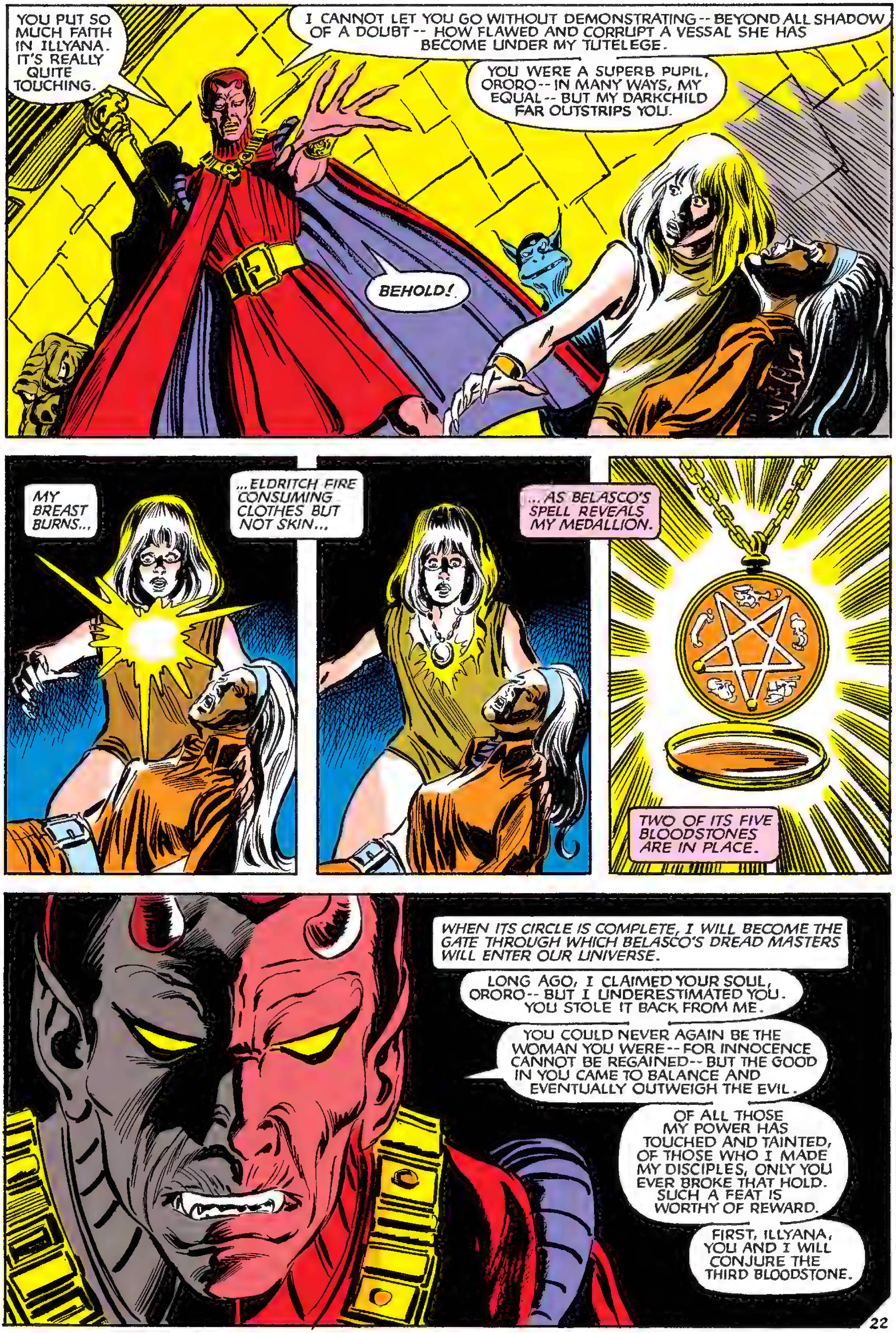

"WHATEVER HAPPENS, YOU ARE NOW BOUND TO ME-- BODY AND SOUL --'TIL THE END OF TIME!"
NO!
A LIGHT-CIRCLE YANKS ME FROM A PAST NIGHTMARE...
THE BATTLEMENTS OF BELASCO'S CITADEL.
...INTO THE PRESENT.
BEEN LOOKING FOR YOU, GIRL.
BOSS ISN'T IN THE BEST OF MOODS--WANTS YOU BAD, BUT YOU AREN'T THERE, HE DOESN'T LIKE THAT.
OWWW-- S'YM, YOU'RE HURTING ME!
THAT'S THE IDEA.
I WAS PUNISHED ONCE BY S'YM.
I SWORE NEVER AGAIN, I'D DIE FIRST.
SO I DAZZLE HIM WITH A FLARE SPELL.
HE LOSES HIS BALANCE AND TRIPS OVER HIS OWN BIG FEET.
A CIRCLE DOES THE REST.
I DON'T KNOW WHERE OR WHEN I SENT HIM, BUT IT SHOULD BE A LONG TIME BEFORE HE MAKES HIS WAY BACK.
THE CASTLE WALL'S BEEN BREACHED--I ALWAYS BELIEVED THAT WAS IMPOSSIBLE--AND I DON'T NEED THE WIND AND RAIN AND LIGHTNING TO TELL ME WHO'S RESPONSIBLE.

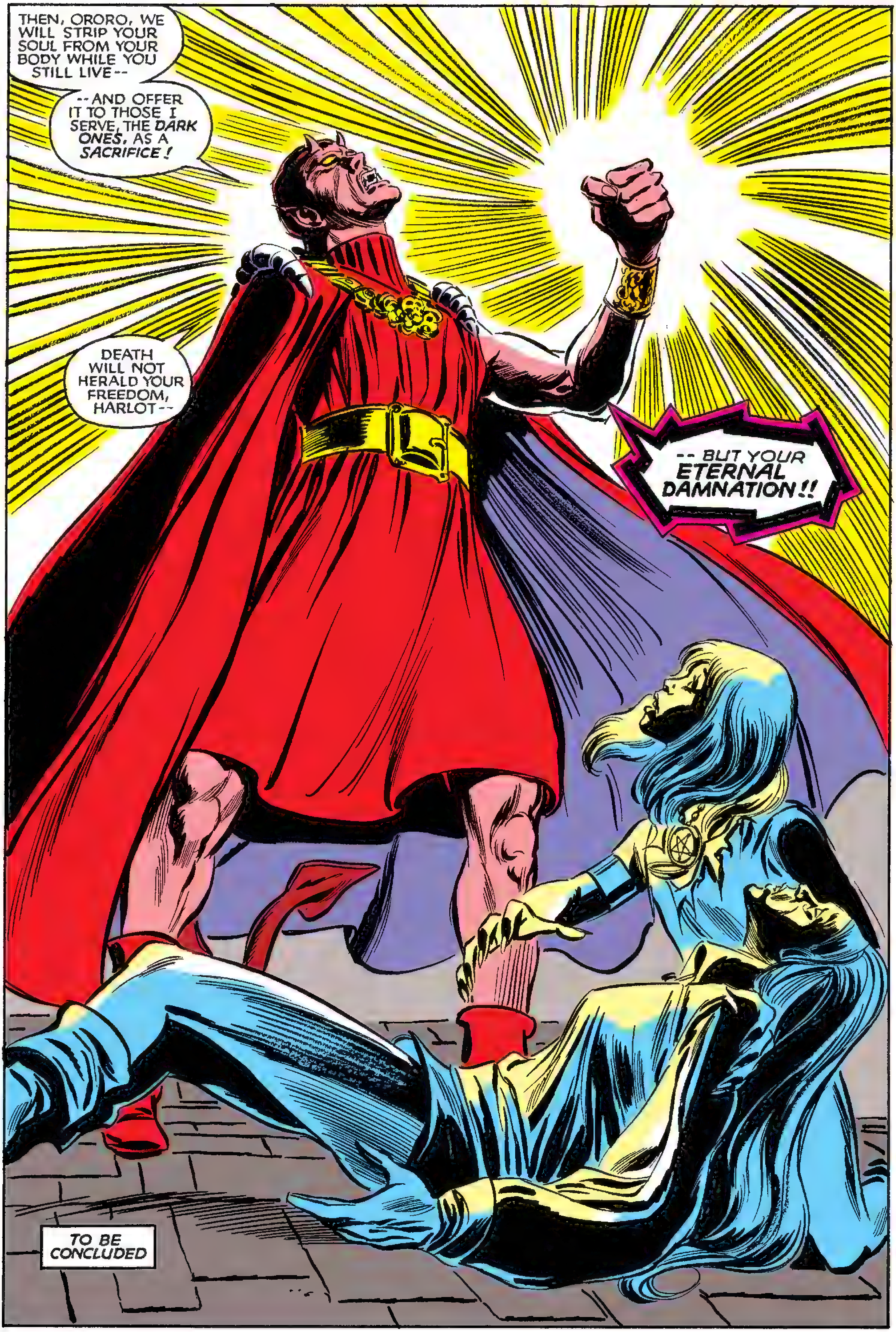

AT LAST, I UNDERSTAND WHY ORORO DID EVERYTHING SHE COULD TO STOP ME-- SHE DOESN'T WANT ME REPEATING HER MISTAKES.
BUT WHY IS SHE ATTACKING?!
SHE WASN'T A MATCH FOR BELASCO WHEN SHE WAS YOUNG. NOW SHE'S OLD-- *OH, NO!*
SHE CAN'T HAVE COME JUST TO RESCUE ME ?!!
I HAVE TO SUMMON A STEPPING DISK-- TO SPIRIT BOTH OF US TO HER GARDEN, WHERE WE'LL BE SAFE, BEFORE IT'S TOO LATE!
MY THOUGHTS AND HEART ARE RACING TOO FAST FOR PROPER CONCENTRATION. I MISS WITH MY FIRST TRY.
CAT DOESN'T ALLOW ME TIME FOR A SECOND.
UGH!
GET AWAY, CAT!


LEAVE HER ALONE!!
CAT WAS EXECUTING *MY* WILL, DAUGHTER. I DO NOT TAKE KINDLY TO DEFIANCE.
PERHAPS A FEW SCARS WILL TEACH YOU PROPER RESPECT.
CAT, *DON'T!*
TRY TO REMEMBER WHO YOU ARRRGH!
I KNOW I'M HURT-- I'VE SEEN CAT'S CLAWS CUT STONE AND STEEL-- AND I ALSO KNOW WORDS ARE USELESS AGAINST HER.
BELASCO'S HOLD IS TOO STRONG.


WHEN I WAS LITTLE, CAT FOUGHT A TIGER, ARMED WITH ONLY HER DAGGER. THE BEAST WAS THREE TIMES HER SIZE, WITH TWO HEADS AND HUGE SABRE-TEETH.
IT NEVER HAD A CHANCE.
I HAVE TO DO BETTER, BARE-HANDED--
--AGAINST THE WOMAN WHO TAUGHT ME HOW TO FIGHT.
SNAP
MY BEST FRIEND.


I'M NUMB-- WHY DON'T I FEEL ANYTHING, NOT ELATION, NOT GRIEF?
DON'T I CARE?
HAVE I BECOME MORE LIKE BELASCO THAN I DARE ADMIT?
ORORO...
YOU DID... WHAT YOU HAD TO... MY CHILD.
DO NOT WEEP... OR MOURN... FOR EITHER OF US. YOURS WAS A MERCY KILLING... THAT FREED CAT'S SOUL FROM BONDAGE.
WITHIN THE HEART... THE SOUL... LIES THE KEY TO VICTORY. WE COULD NOT FIND IT-- BUT YOU *MUST!*
BE GLAD FOR ME, ILLYANA-- FOR I GO TO JOIN THOSE I LOVE...
NOT QUITE, WIND-RIDER.


YOU PUT SO MUCH FAITH IN ILLYANA. IT'S REALLY QUITE TOUCHING.
I CANNOT LET YOU GO WITHOUT DEMONSTRATING -- BEYOND ALL SHADOW OF A DOUBT -- HOW FLAWED AND CORRUPT A VESSAL SHE HAS BECOME UNDER MY TUTELEGE.
YOU WERE A SUPERB PUPIL, ORORO -- IN MANY WAYS, MY EQUAL -- BUT MY DARKCHILD FAR OUTSTRIPS YOU.
BEHOLD!
MY BREAST BURNS...
...ELDRITCH FIRE CONSUMING CLOTHES BUT NOT SKIN...
...AS BELASCO'S SPELL REVEALS MY MEDALLION.
TWO OF ITS FIVE BLOODSTONES ARE IN PLACE.
WHEN ITS CIRCLE IS COMPLETE, I WILL BECOME THE GATE THROUGH WHICH BELASCO'S DREAD MASTERS WILL ENTER OUR UNIVERSE.
LONG AGO, I CLAIMED YOUR SOUL, ORORO -- BUT I UNDERESTIMATED YOU. YOU STOLE IT BACK FROM ME.
YOU COULD NEVER AGAIN BE THE WOMAN YOU WERE -- FOR INNOCENCE CANNOT BE REGAINED -- BUT THE GOOD IN YOU CAME TO BALANCE AND EVENTUALLY OUTWEIGH THE EVIL.
OF ALL THOSE MY POWER HAS TOUCHED AND TAINTED, OF THOSE WHO I MADE MY DISCIPLES, ONLY YOU EVER BROKE THAT HOLD. SUCH A FEAT IS WORTHY OF REWARD.
FIRST, ILLYANA, YOU AND I WILL CONJURE THE THIRD BLOODSTONE.


THEN, ORORO, WE WILL STRIP YOUR SOUL FROM YOUR BODY WHILE YOU STILL LIVE--
--AND OFFER IT TO THOSE I SERVE, THE *DARK ONES*, AS A *SACRIFICE!*
DEATH WILL NOT HERALD YOUR FREEDOM, HARLOT--
-- BUT YOUR *ETERNAL DAMNATION!!*
TO BE CONCLUDED

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FROM THE X-MEN
STORM™ AND ILLYANA™
MAGIK
#4 IN A FOUR-ISSUE LIMITED SERIES
TOM PALMER

STAN LEE PRESENTS...

Darkchild

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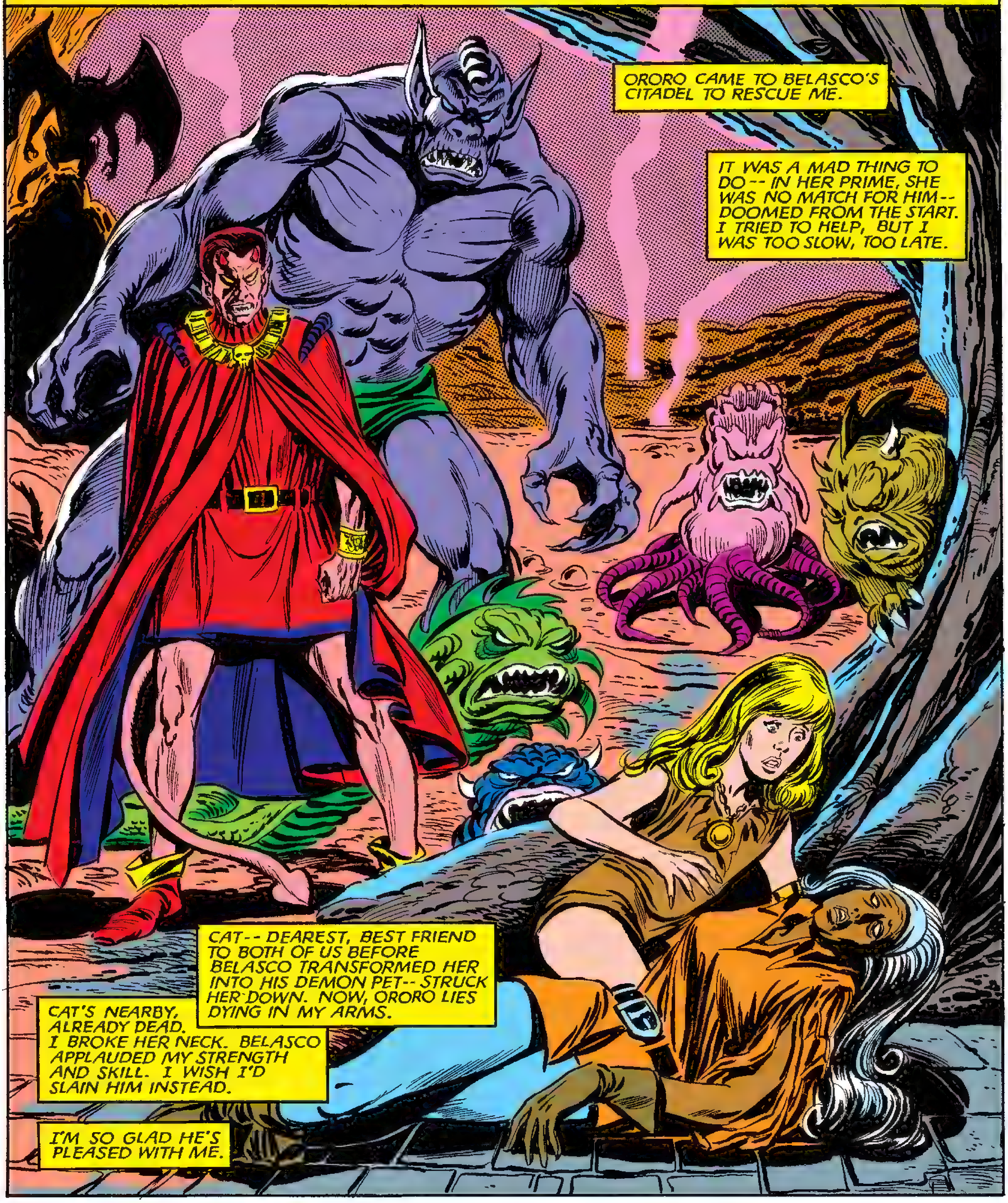
ORORO CAME TO BELASCO'S CITADEL TO RESCUE ME.
IT WAS A MAD THING TO DO-- IN HER PRIME, SHE WAS NO MATCH FOR HIM-- DOOMED FROM THE START. I TRIED TO HELP, BUT I WAS TOO SLOW, TOO LATE.
CAT-- DEAREST, BEST FRIEND TO BOTH OF US BEFORE BELASCO TRANSFORMED HER INTO HIS DEMON PET-- STRUCK HER DOWN. NOW, ORORO LIES DYING IN MY ARMS.
CAT'S NEARBY, ALREADY DEAD. I BROKE HER NECK. BELASCO APPLAUDED MY STRENGTH AND SKILL. I WISH I'D SLAIN HIM INSTEAD.
I'M SO GLAD HE'S PLEASED WITH ME.

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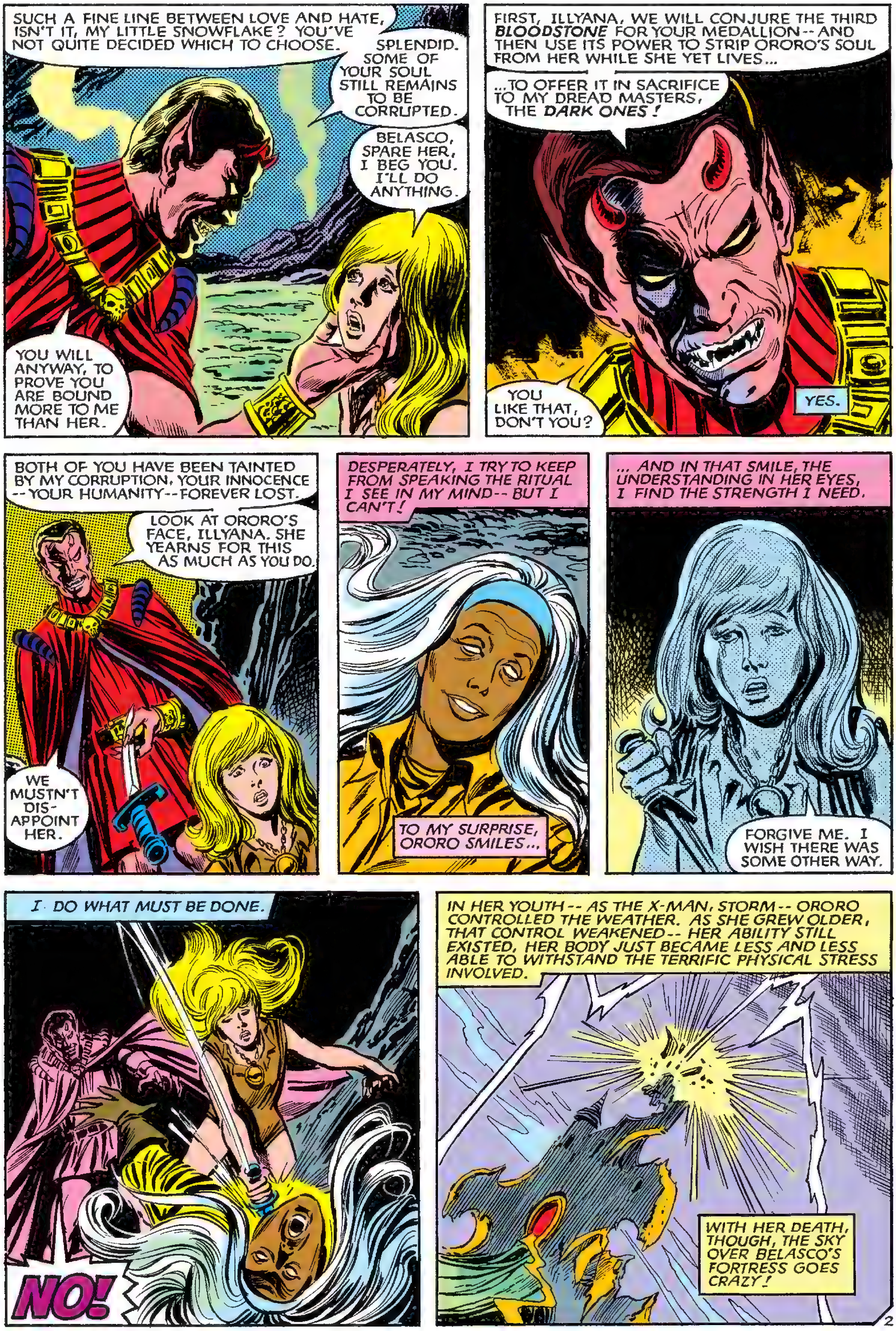
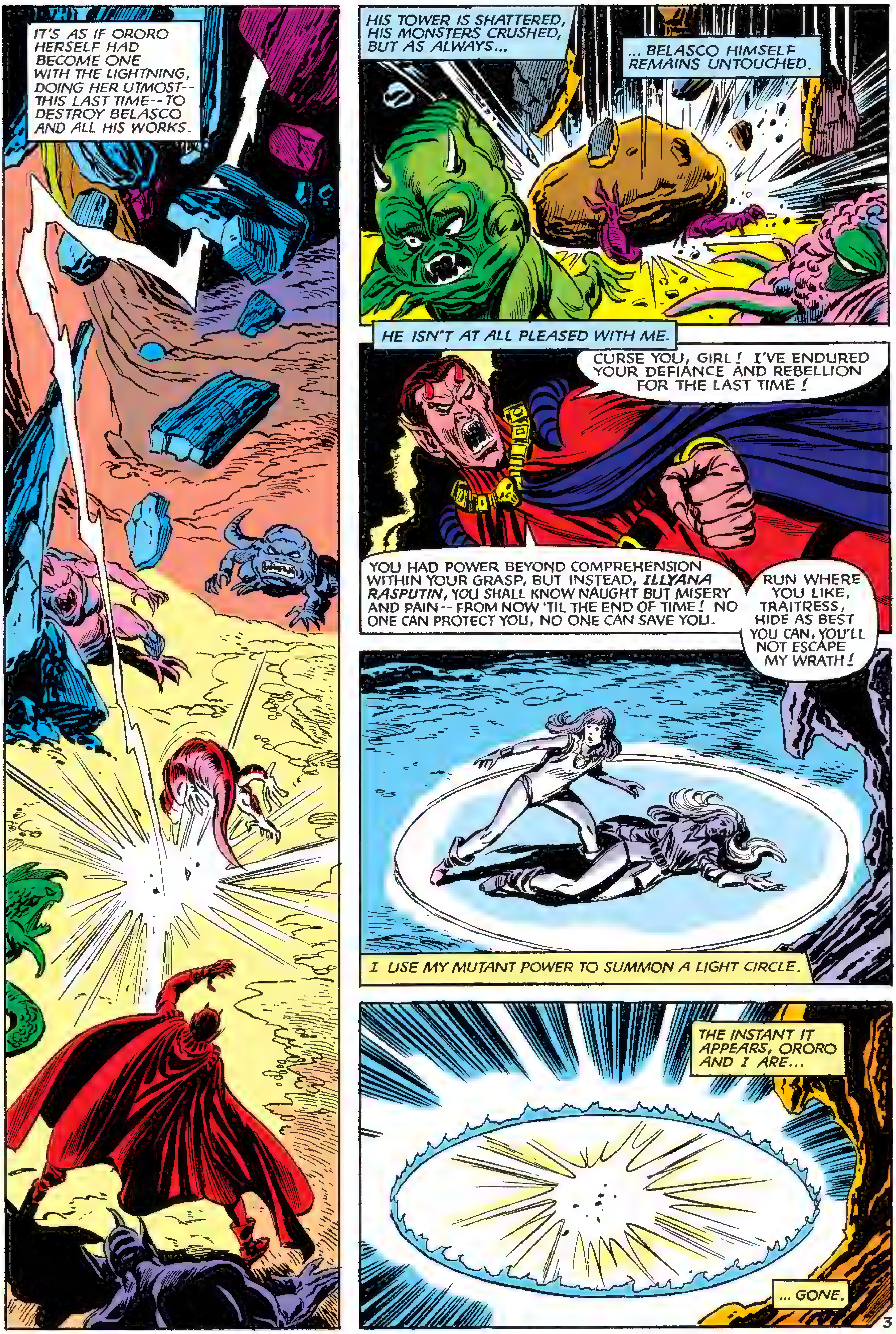
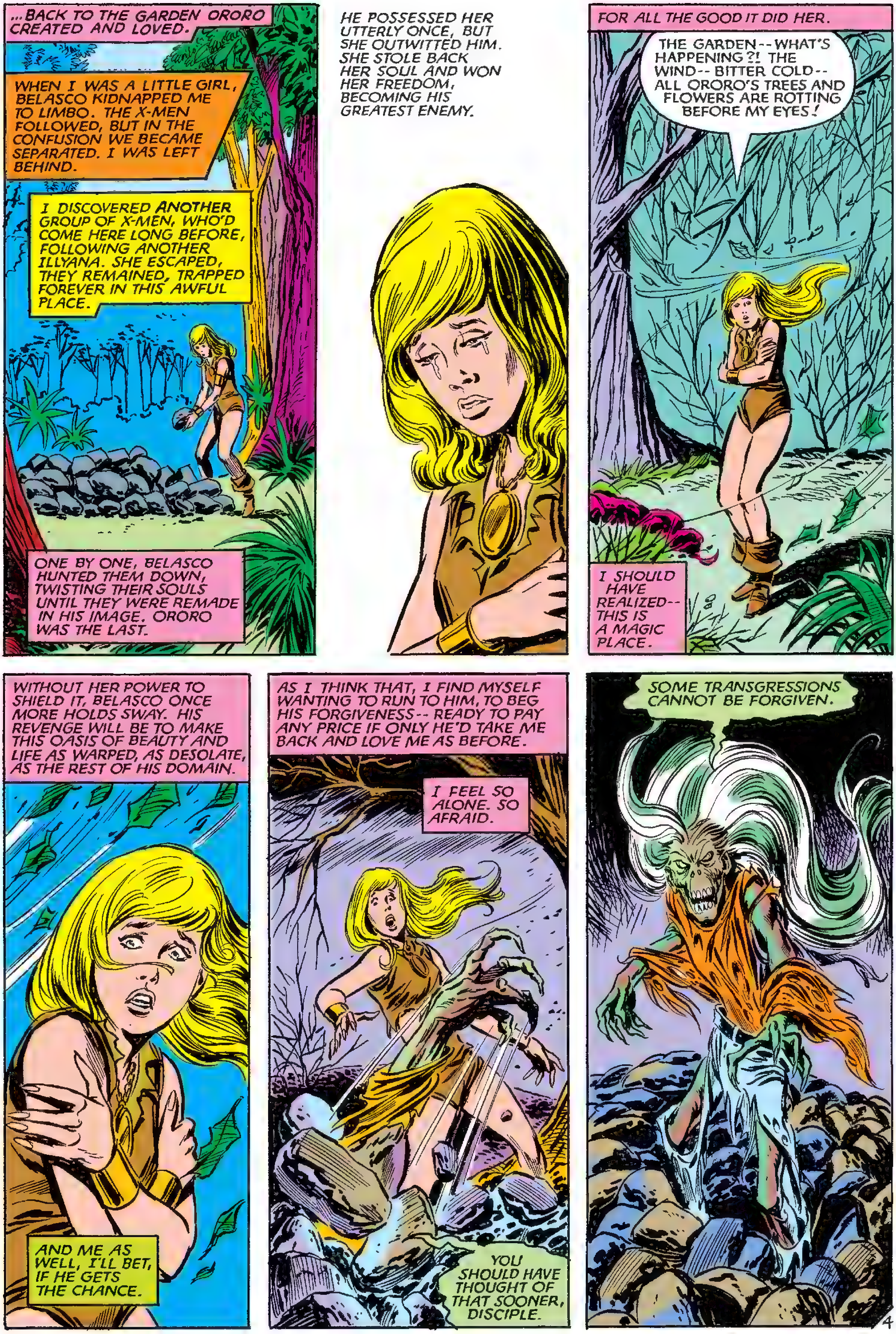
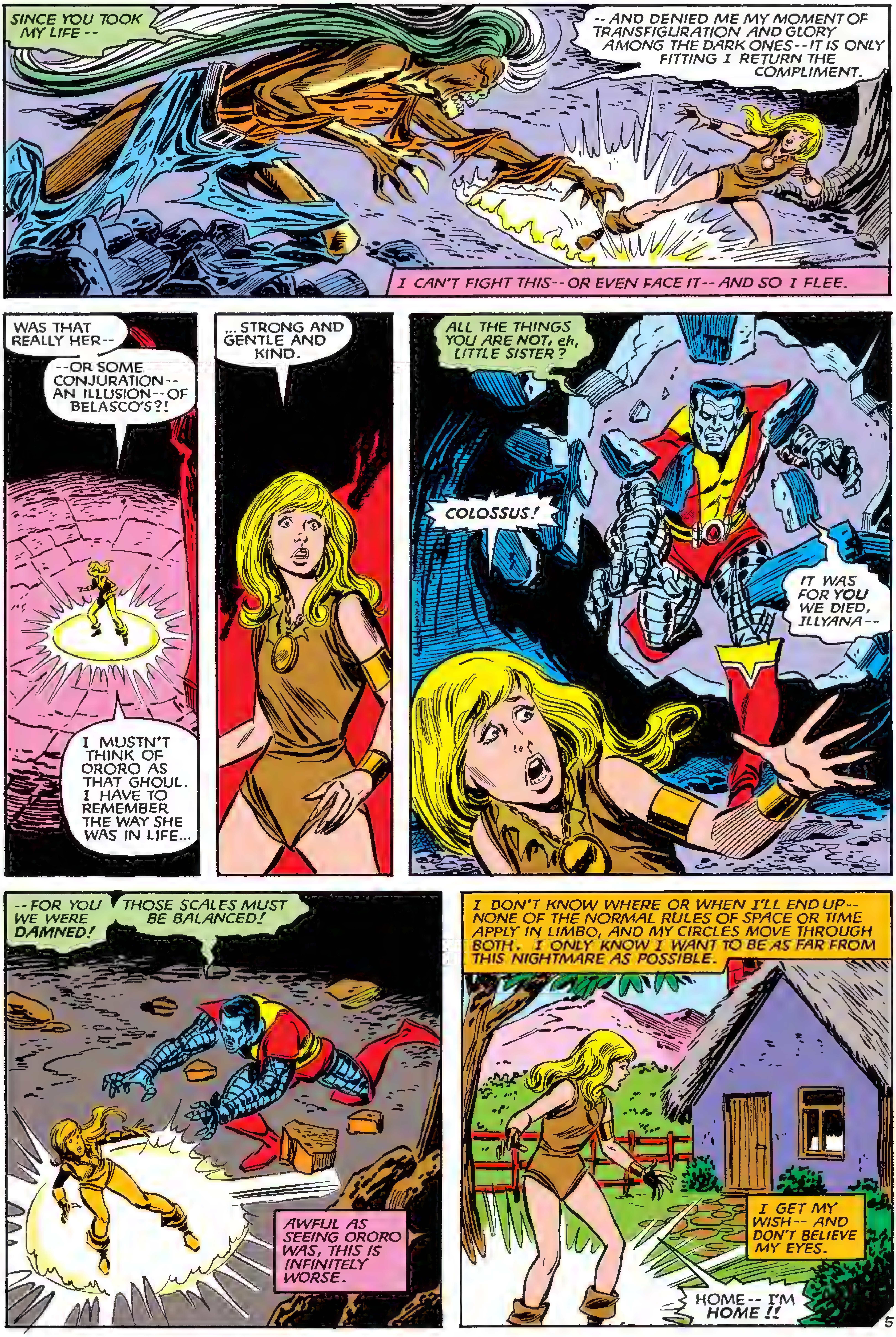
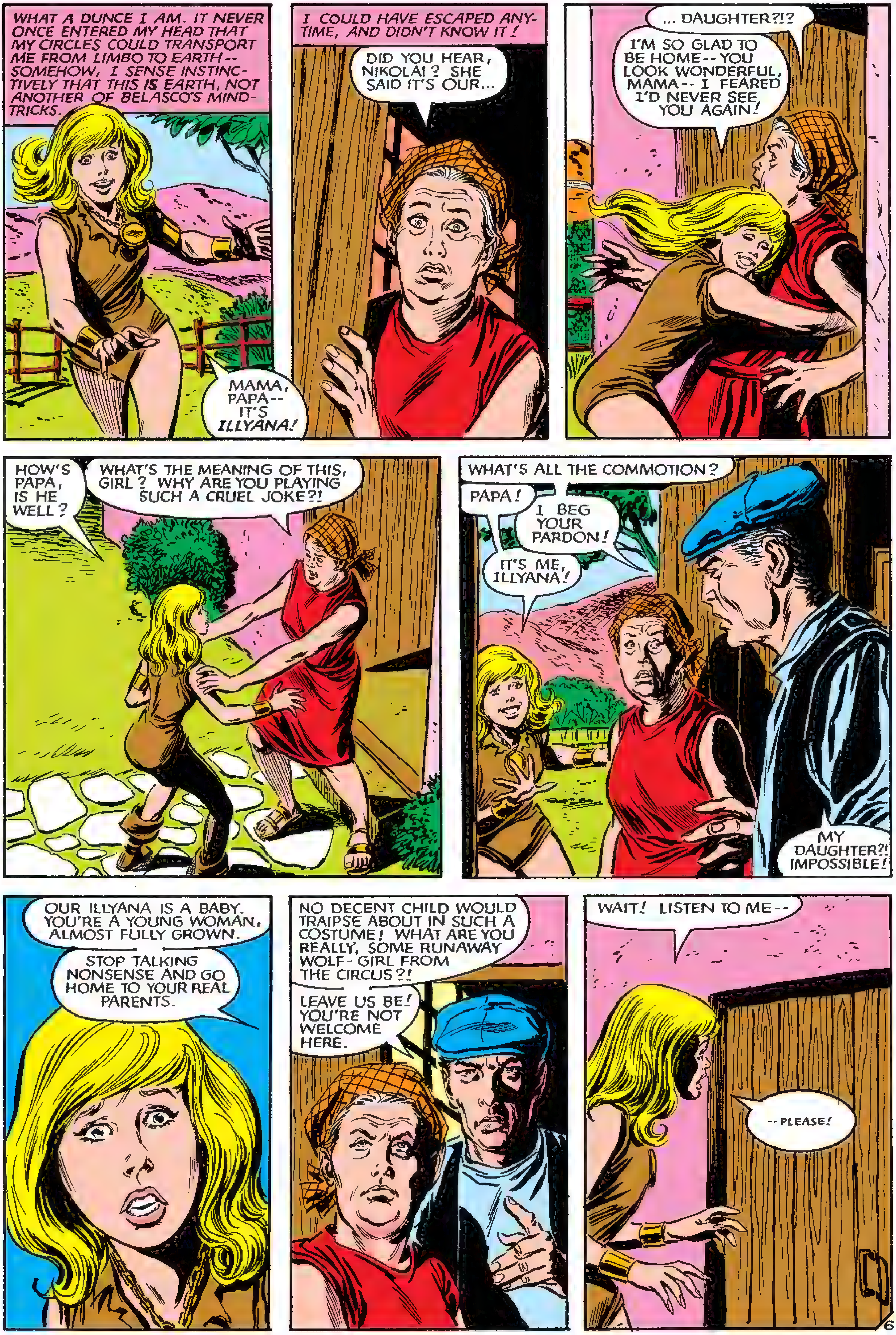
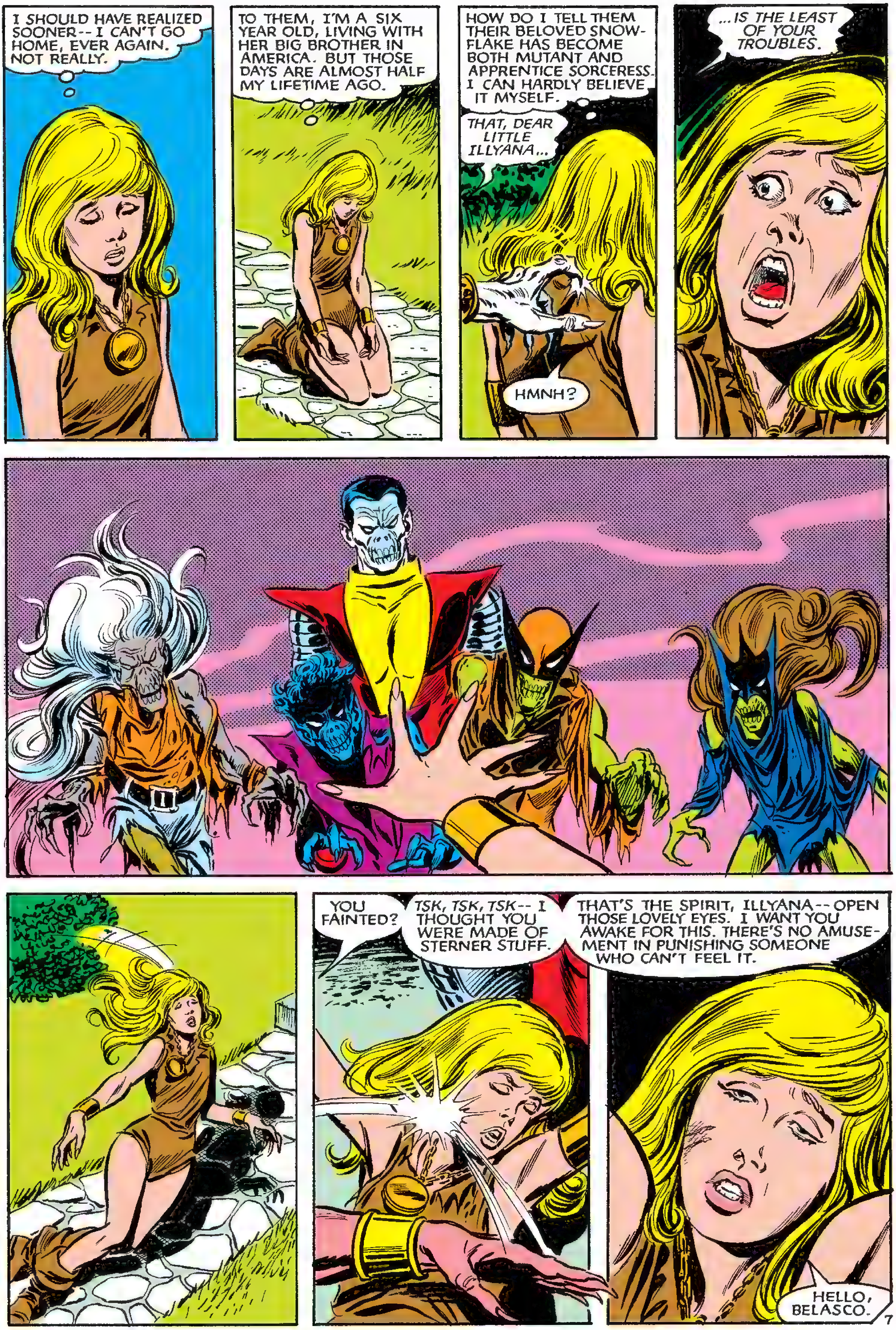

SUCH A FINE LINE BETWEEN LOVE AND HATE, ISN'T IT, MY LITTLE SNOWFLAKE? YOU'VE NOT QUITE DECIDED WHICH TO CHOOSE.
SPLENDID. SOME OF YOUR SOUL STILL REMAINS TO BE CORRUPTED.
BELASCO, SPARE HER, I BEG YOU. I'LL DO ANYTHING.
YOU WILL ANYWAY, TO PROVE YOU ARE BOUND MORE TO ME THAN HER.
FIRST, ILLYANA, WE WILL CONJURE THE THIRD **BLOODSTONE** FOR YOUR MEDALLION--AND THEN USE ITS POWER TO STRIP ORORO'S SOUL FROM HER WHILE SHE YET LIVES...
...TO OFFER IT IN SACRIFICE TO MY DREAD MASTERS, THE ***DARK ONES!***
YOU LIKE THAT, DON'T YOU?
YES.
BOTH OF YOU HAVE BEEN TAINTED BY MY CORRUPTION. YOUR INNOCENCE --YOUR HUMANITY--FOREVER LOST.
LOOK AT ORORO'S FACE, ILLYANA. SHE YEARNS FOR THIS AS MUCH AS YOU DO.
WE MUSTN'T DISAPPOINT HER.
DESPERATELY, I TRY TO KEEP FROM SPEAKING THE RITUAL I SEE IN MY MIND-- BUT I CAN'T!
TO MY SURPRISE, ORORO SMILES...
... AND IN THAT SMILE, THE UNDERSTANDING IN HER EYES, I FIND THE STRENGTH I NEED.
FORGIVE ME. I WISH THERE WAS SOME OTHER WAY.
I DO WHAT MUST BE DONE.
NO!
IN HER YOUTH-- AS THE X-MAN, STORM-- ORORO CONTROLLED THE WEATHER. AS SHE GREW OLDER, THAT CONTROL WEAKENED-- HER ABILITY STILL EXISTED, HER BODY JUST BECAME LESS AND LESS ABLE TO WITHSTAND THE TERRIFIC PHYSICAL STRESS INVOLVED.
WITH HER DEATH, THOUGH, THE SKY OVER BELASCO'S FORTRESS GOES CRAZY!

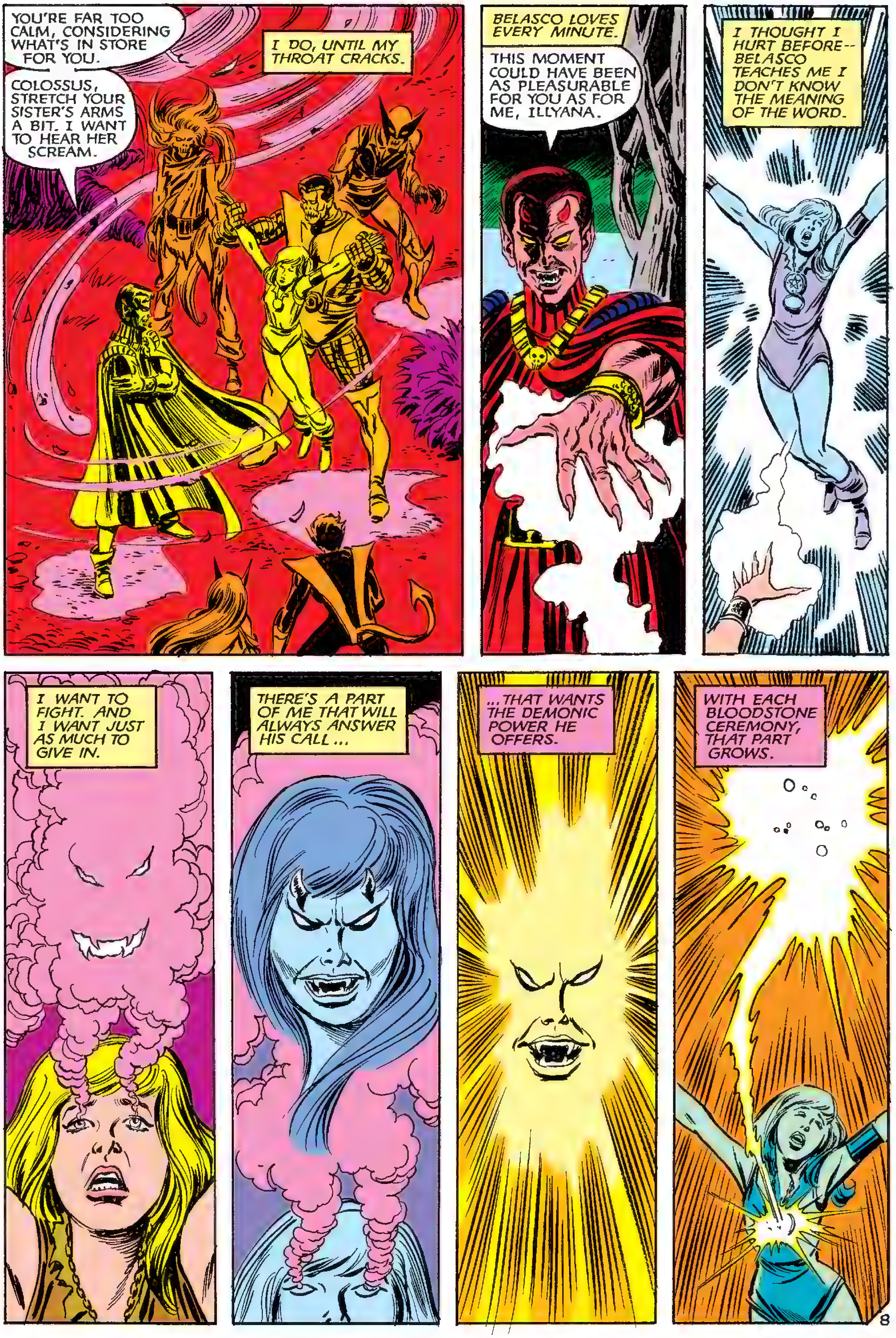

IT'S AS IF ORORO HERSELF HAD BECOME ONE WITH THE LIGHTNING, DOING HER UTMOST-- THIS LAST TIME--TO DESTROY BELASCO AND ALL HIS WORKS.
HIS TOWER IS SHATTERED, HIS MONSTERS CRUSHED, BUT AS ALWAYS...
... BELASCO HIMSELF REMAINS UNTOUCHED.
HE ISN'T AT ALL PLEASED WITH ME.
CURSE YOU, GIRL! I'VE ENDURED YOUR DEFIANCE AND REBELLION FOR THE LAST TIME!
YOU HAD POWER BEYOND COMPREHENSION WITHIN YOUR GRASP, BUT INSTEAD, ILLYANA RASPUTIN, YOU SHALL KNOW NAUGHT BUT MISERY AND PAIN-- FROM NOW 'TIL THE END OF TIME! NO ONE CAN PROTECT YOU, NO ONE CAN SAVE YOU.
RUN WHERE YOU LIKE, TRAITRESS, HIDE AS BEST YOU CAN, YOU'LL NOT ESCAPE MY WRATH!
I USE MY MUTANT POWER TO SUMMON A LIGHT CIRCLE.
THE INSTANT IT APPEARS, ORORO AND I ARE...
... GONE.

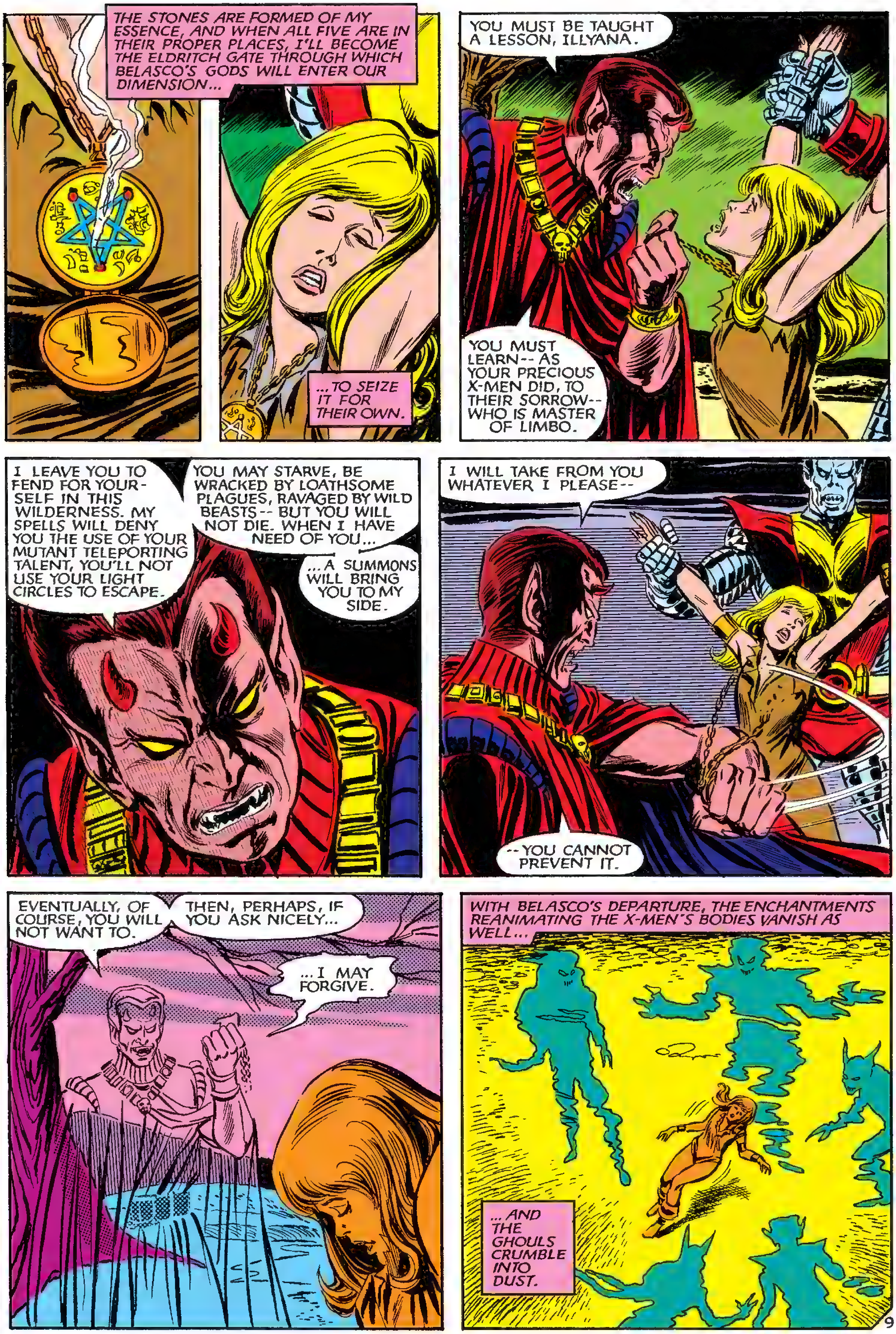

...BACK TO THE GARDEN ORORO CREATED AND LOVED.
WHEN I WAS A LITTLE GIRL, BELASCO KIDNAPPED ME TO LIMBO. THE X-MEN FOLLOWED, BUT IN THE CONFUSION WE BECAME SEPARATED. I WAS LEFT BEHIND.
I DISCOVERED ANOTHER GROUP OF X-MEN, WHO'D COME HERE LONG BEFORE, FOLLOWING ANOTHER ILLYANA. SHE ESCAPED, THEY REMAINED, TRAPPED FOREVER IN THIS AWFUL PLACE.
ONE BY ONE, BELASCO HUNTED THEM DOWN, TWISTING THEIR SOULS UNTIL THEY WERE REMADE IN HIS IMAGE. ORORO WAS THE LAST.
HE POSSESSED HER UTTERLY ONCE, BUT SHE OUTWITTED HIM. SHE STOLE BACK HER SOUL AND WON HER FREEDOM, BECOMING HIS GREATEST ENEMY.
FOR ALL THE GOOD IT DID HER.
THE GARDEN--WHAT'S HAPPENING?! THE WIND--BITTER COLD--ALL ORORO'S TREES AND FLOWERS ARE ROTTING BEFORE MY EYES!
I SHOULD HAVE REALIZED--THIS IS A MAGIC PLACE.
WITHOUT HER POWER TO SHIELD IT, BELASCO ONCE MORE HOLDS SWAY. HIS REVENGE WILL BE TO MAKE THIS OASIS OF BEAUTY AND LIFE AS WARPED, AS DESOLATE, AS THE REST OF HIS DOMAIN.
AND ME AS WELL, I'LL BET, IF HE GETS THE CHANCE.
AS I THINK THAT, I FIND MYSELF WANTING TO RUN TO HIM, TO BEG HIS FORGIVENESS--READY TO PAY ANY PRICE IF ONLY HE'D TAKE ME BACK AND LOVE ME AS BEFORE.
I FEEL SO ALONE. SO AFRAID.
YOU SHOULD HAVE THOUGHT OF THAT SOONER, DISCIPLE.
SOME TRANSGRESSIONS CANNOT BE FORGIVEN.

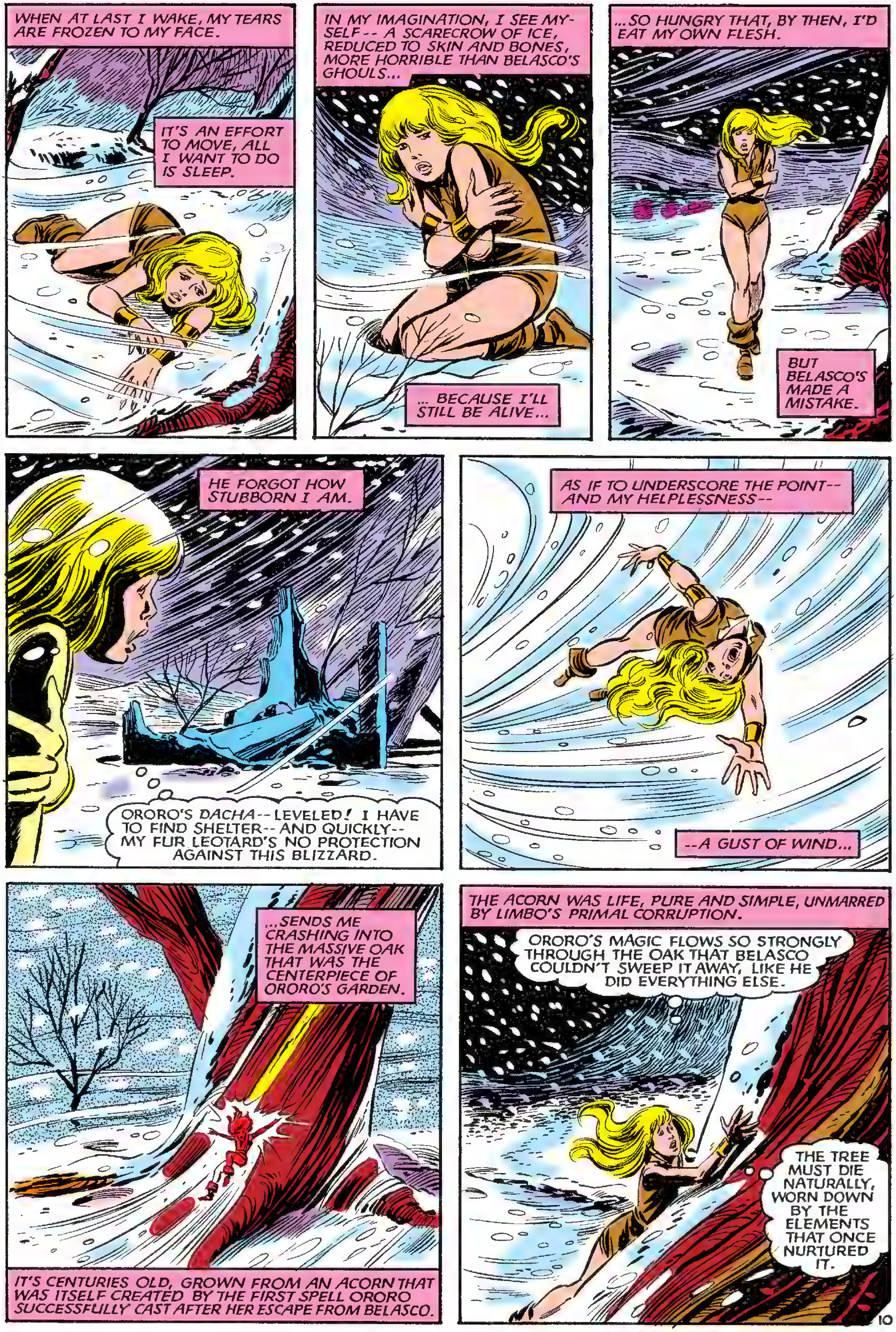

SINCE YOU TOOK MY LIFE --
-- AND DENIED ME MY MOMENT OF TRANSFIGURATION AND GLORY AMONG THE DARK ONES -- IT IS ONLY FITTING I RETURN THE COMPLIMENT.
I CAN'T FIGHT THIS -- OR EVEN FACE IT -- AND SO I FLEE.
WAS THAT REALLY HER --
-- OR SOME CONJURATION -- AN ILLUSION -- OF BELASCO'S?!
I MUSTN'T THINK OF ORORO AS THAT GHOUL. I HAVE TO REMEMBER THE WAY SHE WAS IN LIFE...
...STRONG AND GENTLE AND KIND.
ALL THE THINGS YOU ARE NOT, eh, LITTLE SISTER?
COLOSSUS!
IT WAS FOR YOU WE DIED, ILLYANA --
-- FOR YOU WE WERE DAMNED!
THOSE SCALES MUST BE BALANCED!
AWFUL AS SEEING ORORO WAS, THIS IS INFINITELY WORSE.
I DON'T KNOW WHERE OR WHEN I'LL END UP -- NONE OF THE NORMAL RULES OF SPACE OR TIME APPLY IN LIMBO, AND MY CIRCLES MOVE THROUGH BOTH. I ONLY KNOW I WANT TO BE AS FAR FROM THIS NIGHTMARE AS POSSIBLE.
I GET MY WISH -- AND DON'T BELIEVE MY EYES.
HOME -- I'M HOME!!

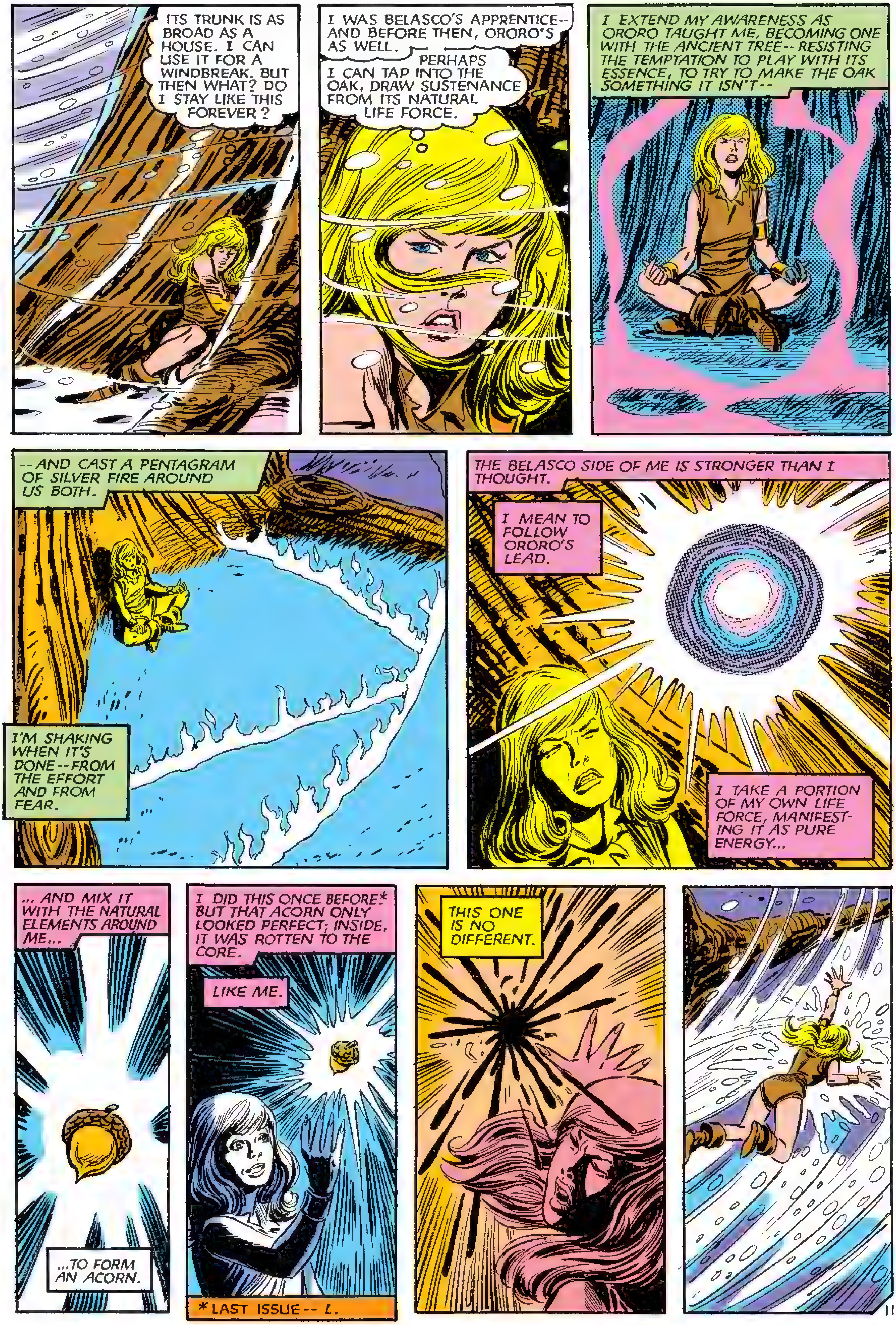

WHAT A DUNCE I AM. IT NEVER ONCE ENTERED MY HEAD THAT MY CIRCLES COULD TRANSPORT ME FROM LIMBO TO EARTH -- SOMEHOW, I SENSE INSTINCTIVELY THAT THIS IS EARTH, NOT ANOTHER OF BELASCO'S MIND-TRICKS.
MAMA, PAPA -- IT'S ILLYANA!
I COULD HAVE ESCAPED ANYTIME, AND DIDN'T KNOW IT!
DID YOU HEAR, NIKOLAI? SHE SAID IT'S OUR...
... DAUGHTER?!?
I'M SO GLAD TO BE HOME -- YOU LOOK WONDERFUL, MAMA -- I FEARED I'D NEVER SEE YOU AGAIN!
HOW'S PAPA, IS HE WELL?
WHAT'S THE MEANING OF THIS, GIRL? WHY ARE YOU PLAYING SUCH A CRUEL JOKE?!
WHAT'S ALL THE COMMOTION?
PAPA!
I BEG YOUR PARDON!
IT'S ME, ILLYANA!
MY DAUGHTER?! IMPOSSIBLE!
OUR ILLYANA IS A BABY. YOU'RE A YOUNG WOMAN, ALMOST FULLY GROWN.
STOP TALKING NONSENSE AND GO HOME TO YOUR REAL PARENTS.
NO DECENT CHILD WOULD TRAIPSE ABOUT IN SUCH A COSTUME! WHAT ARE YOU REALLY, SOME RUNAWAY WOLF-GIRL FROM THE CIRCUS?!
LEAVE US BE! YOU'RE NOT WELCOME HERE.
WAIT! LISTEN TO ME --
-- PLEASE!

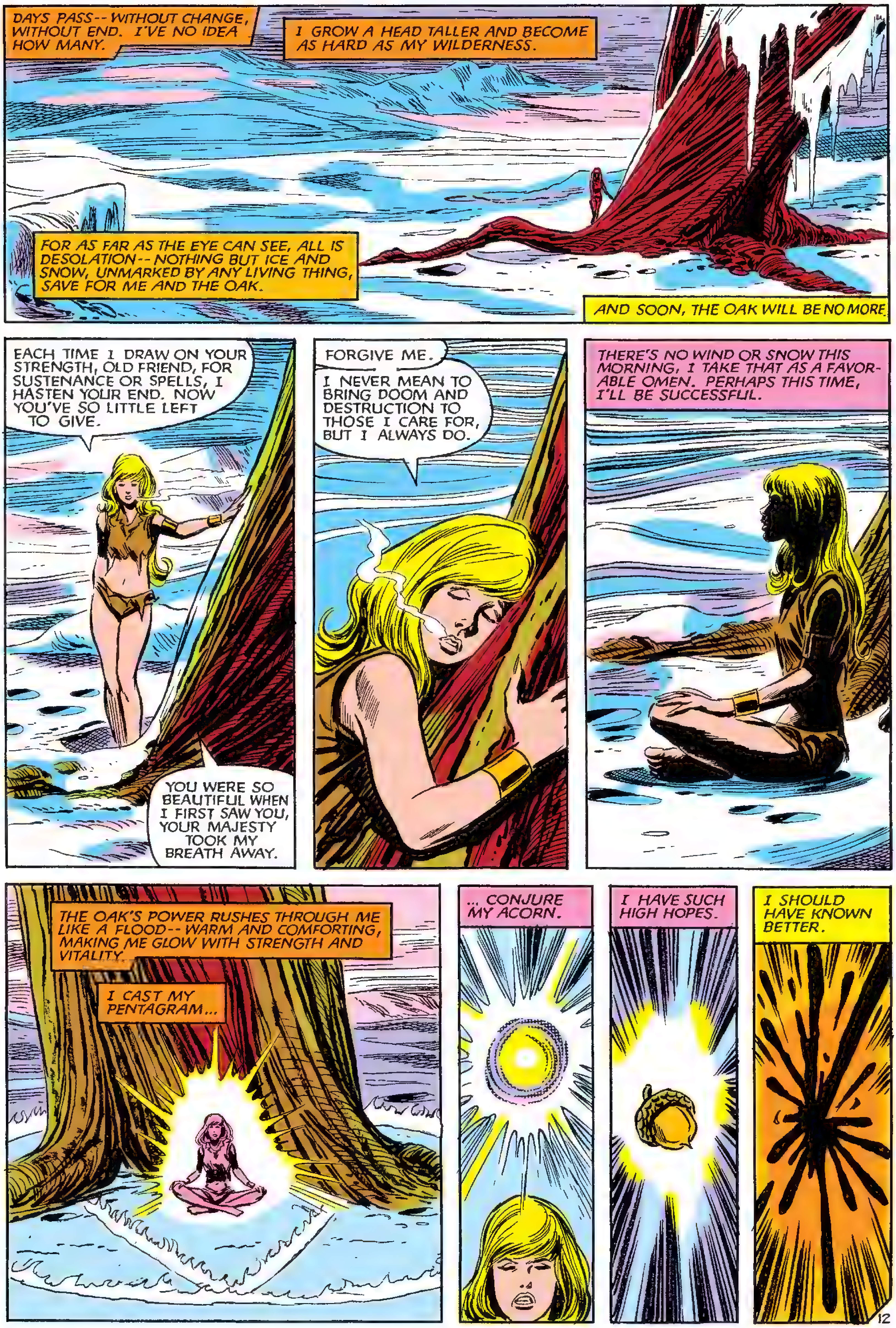

I SHOULD HAVE REALIZED SOONER-- I CAN'T GO HOME, EVER AGAIN. NOT REALLY.
TO THEM, I'M A SIX YEAR OLD, LIVING WITH HER BIG BROTHER IN AMERICA. BUT THOSE DAYS ARE ALMOST HALF MY LIFETIME AGO.
HOW DO I TELL THEM THEIR BELOVED SNOWFLAKE HAS BECOME BOTH MUTANT AND APPRENTICE SORCERESS. I CAN HARDLY BELIEVE IT MYSELF.
THAT, DEAR LITTLE ILLYANA...
HMNH?
...IS THE LEAST OF YOUR TROUBLES.
YOU FAINTED?
TSK, TSK, TSK-- I THOUGHT YOU WERE MADE OF STERNER STUFF.
THAT'S THE SPIRIT, ILLYANA-- OPEN THOSE LOVELY EYES. I WANT YOU AWAKE FOR THIS. THERE'S NO AMUSEMENT IN PUNISHING SOMEONE WHO CAN'T FEEL IT.
HELLO, BELASCO.

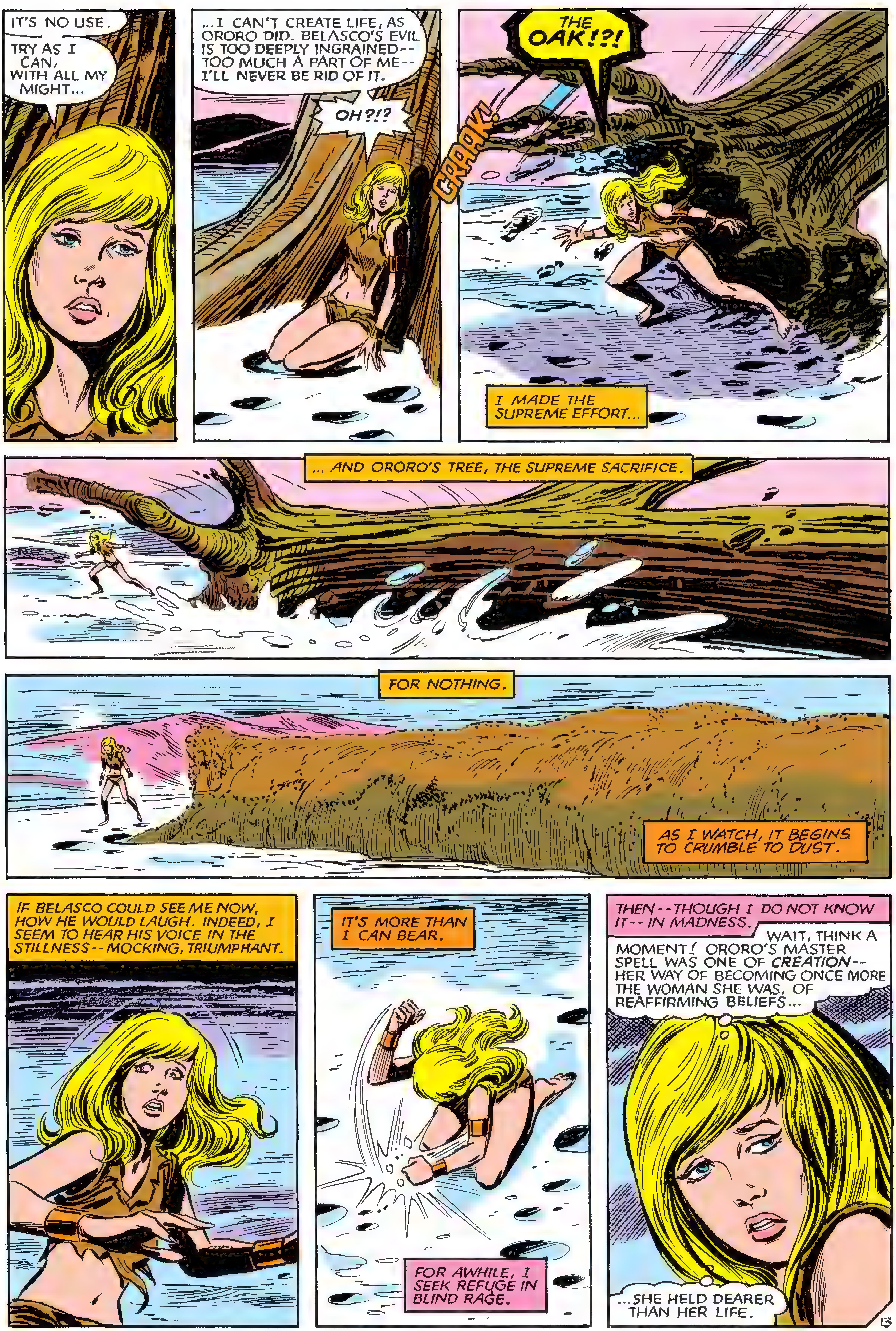

YOU'RE FAR TOO CALM, CONSIDERING WHAT'S IN STORE FOR YOU.
COLOSSUS, STRETCH YOUR SISTER'S ARMS A BIT. I WANT TO HEAR HER SCREAM.
I DO, UNTIL MY THROAT CRACKS.
BELASCO LOVES EVERY MINUTE.
THIS MOMENT COULD HAVE BEEN AS PLEASURABLE FOR YOU AS FOR ME, ILLYANA.
I THOUGHT I HURT BEFORE-- BELASCO TEACHES ME I DON'T KNOW THE MEANING OF THE WORD.
I WANT TO FIGHT. AND I WANT JUST AS MUCH TO GIVE IN.
THERE'S A PART OF ME THAT WILL ALWAYS ANSWER HIS CALL...
...THAT WANTS THE DEMONIC POWER HE OFFERS.
WITH EACH BLOODSTONE CEREMONY, THAT PART GROWS.

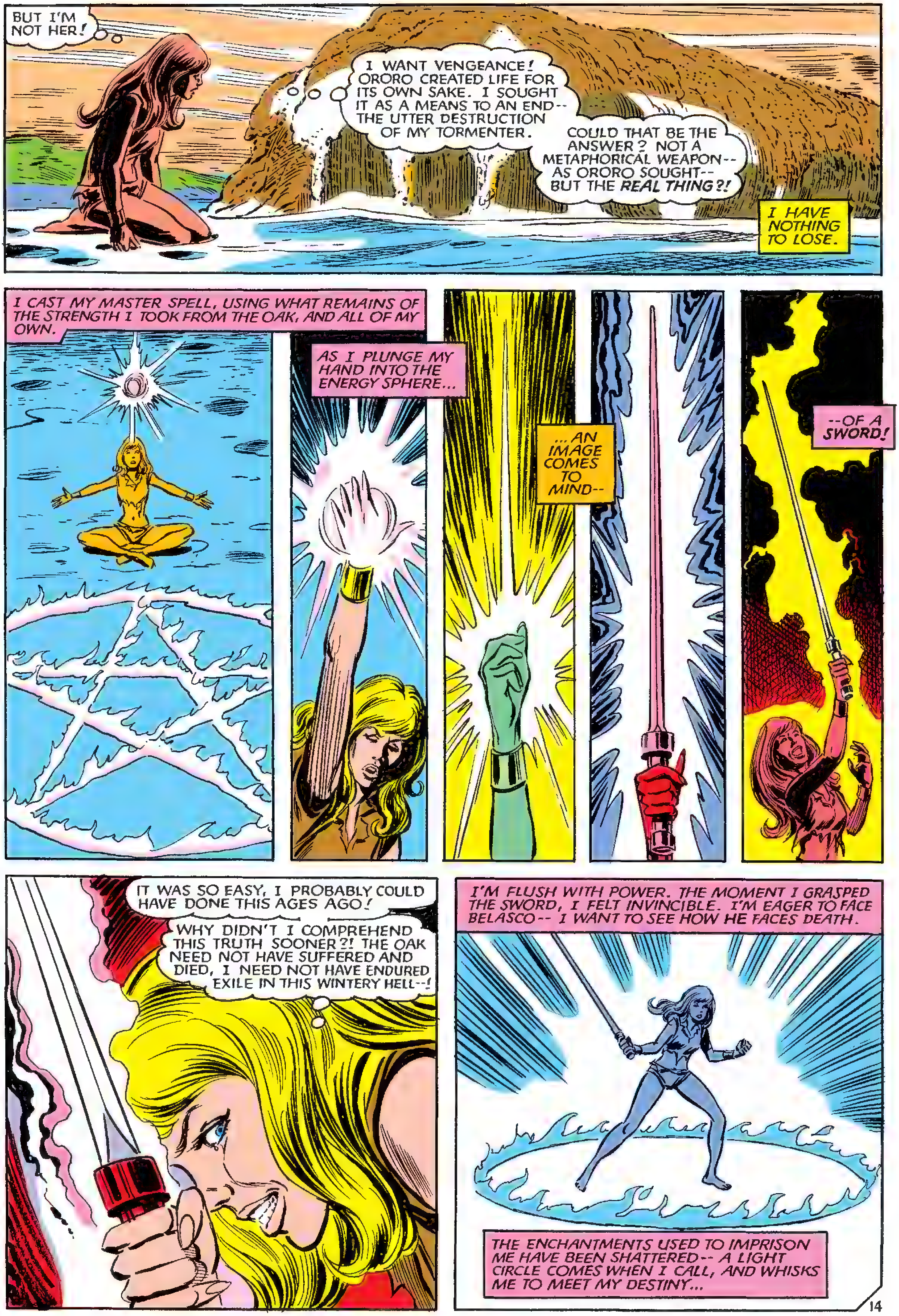

THE STONES ARE FORMED OF MY ESSENCE, AND WHEN ALL FIVE ARE IN THEIR PROPER PLACES, I'LL BECOME THE ELDRITCH GATE THROUGH WHICH BELASCO'S GODS WILL ENTER OUR DIMENSION...
...TO SEIZE IT FOR THEIR OWN.
YOU MUST BE TAUGHT A LESSON, ILLYANA.
YOU MUST LEARN-- AS YOUR PRECIOUS X-MEN DID, TO THEIR SORROW-- WHO IS MASTER OF LIMBO.
I LEAVE YOU TO FEND FOR YOURSELF IN THIS WILDERNESS. MY SPELLS WILL DENY YOU THE USE OF YOUR MUTANT TELEPORTING TALENT, YOU'LL NOT USE YOUR LIGHT CIRCLES TO ESCAPE.
YOU MAY STARVE, BE WRACKED BY LOATHSOME PLAGUES, RAVAGED BY WILD BEASTS-- BUT YOU WILL NOT DIE. WHEN I HAVE NEED OF YOU...
...A SUMMONS WILL BRING YOU TO MY SIDE.
I WILL TAKE FROM YOU WHATEVER I PLEASE--
--YOU CANNOT PREVENT IT.
EVENTUALLY, OF COURSE, YOU WILL NOT WANT TO.
THEN, PERHAPS, IF YOU ASK NICELY...
...I MAY FORGIVE.
WITH BELASCO'S DEPARTURE, THE ENCHANTMENTS REANIMATING THE X-MEN'S BODIES VANISH AS WELL...
...AND THE GHOULS CRUMBLE INTO DUST.

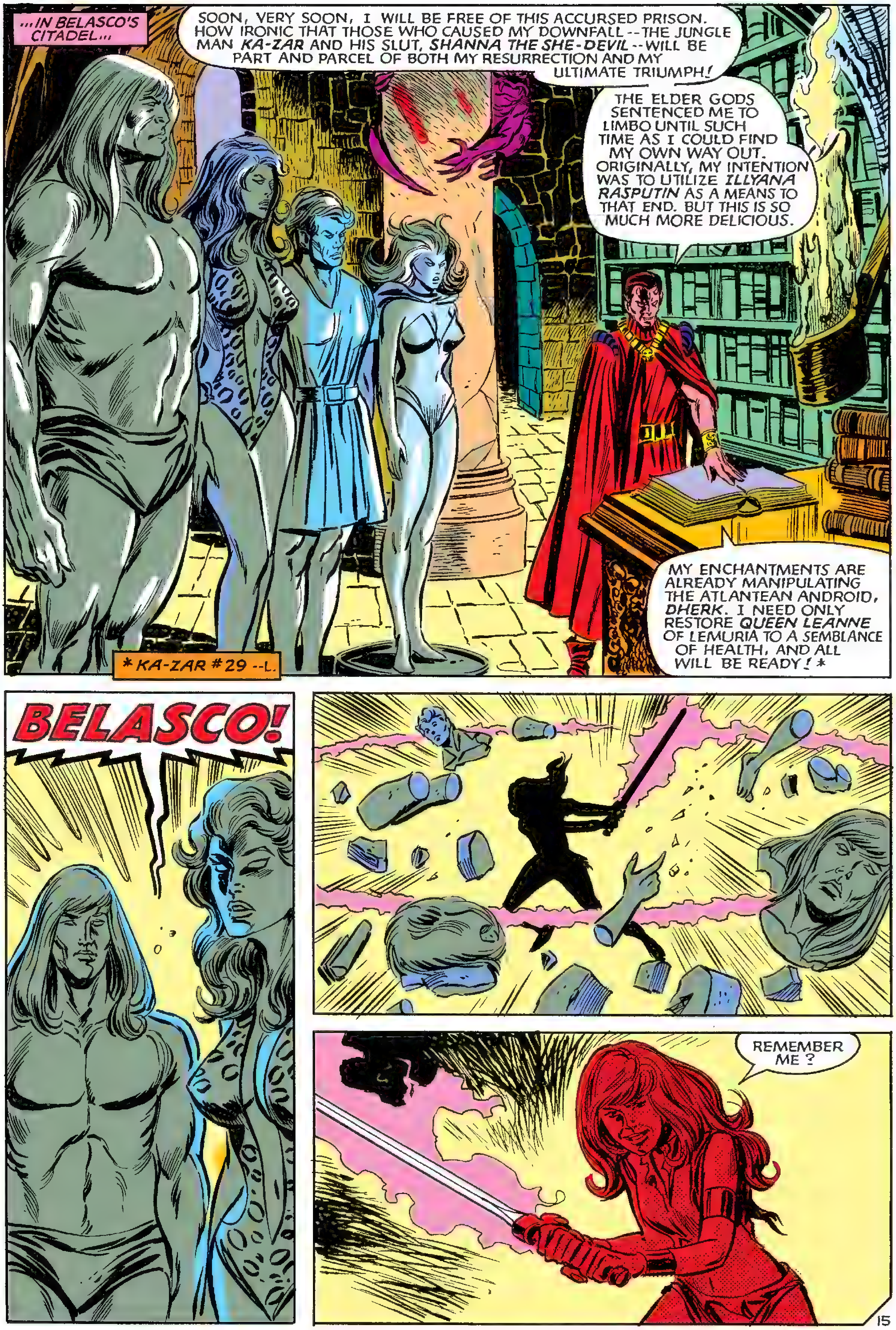

WHEN AT LAST I WAKE, MY TEARS ARE FROZEN TO MY FACE.
IT'S AN EFFORT TO MOVE, ALL I WANT TO DO IS SLEEP.
IN MY IMAGINATION, I SEE MYSELF -- A SCARECROW OF ICE, REDUCED TO SKIN AND BONES, MORE HORRIBLE THAN BELASCO'S GHOULS...
... BECAUSE I'LL STILL BE ALIVE...
...SO HUNGRY THAT, BY THEN, I'D EAT MY OWN FLESH.
BUT BELASCO'S MADE A MISTAKE.
HE FORGOT HOW STUBBORN I AM.
ORORO'S *DACHA*--LEVELED! I HAVE TO FIND SHELTER--AND QUICKLY--MY FUR LEOTARD'S NO PROTECTION AGAINST THIS BLIZZARD.
AS IF TO UNDERSCORE THE POINT--AND MY HELPLESSNESS--
--A GUST OF WIND...
...SENDS ME CRASHING INTO THE MASSIVE OAK THAT WAS THE CENTERPIECE OF ORORO'S GARDEN.
IT'S CENTURIES OLD, GROWN FROM AN ACORN THAT WAS ITSELF CREATED BY THE FIRST SPELL ORORO SUCCESSFULLY CAST AFTER HER ESCAPE FROM BELASCO.
THE ACORN WAS LIFE, PURE AND SIMPLE, UNMARRED BY LIMBO'S PRIMAL CORRUPTION.
ORORO'S MAGIC FLOWS SO STRONGLY THROUGH THE OAK THAT BELASCO COULDN'T SWEEP IT AWAY, LIKE HE DID EVERYTHING ELSE.
THE TREE MUST DIE NATURALLY, WORN DOWN BY THE ELEMENTS THAT ONCE NURTURED IT.

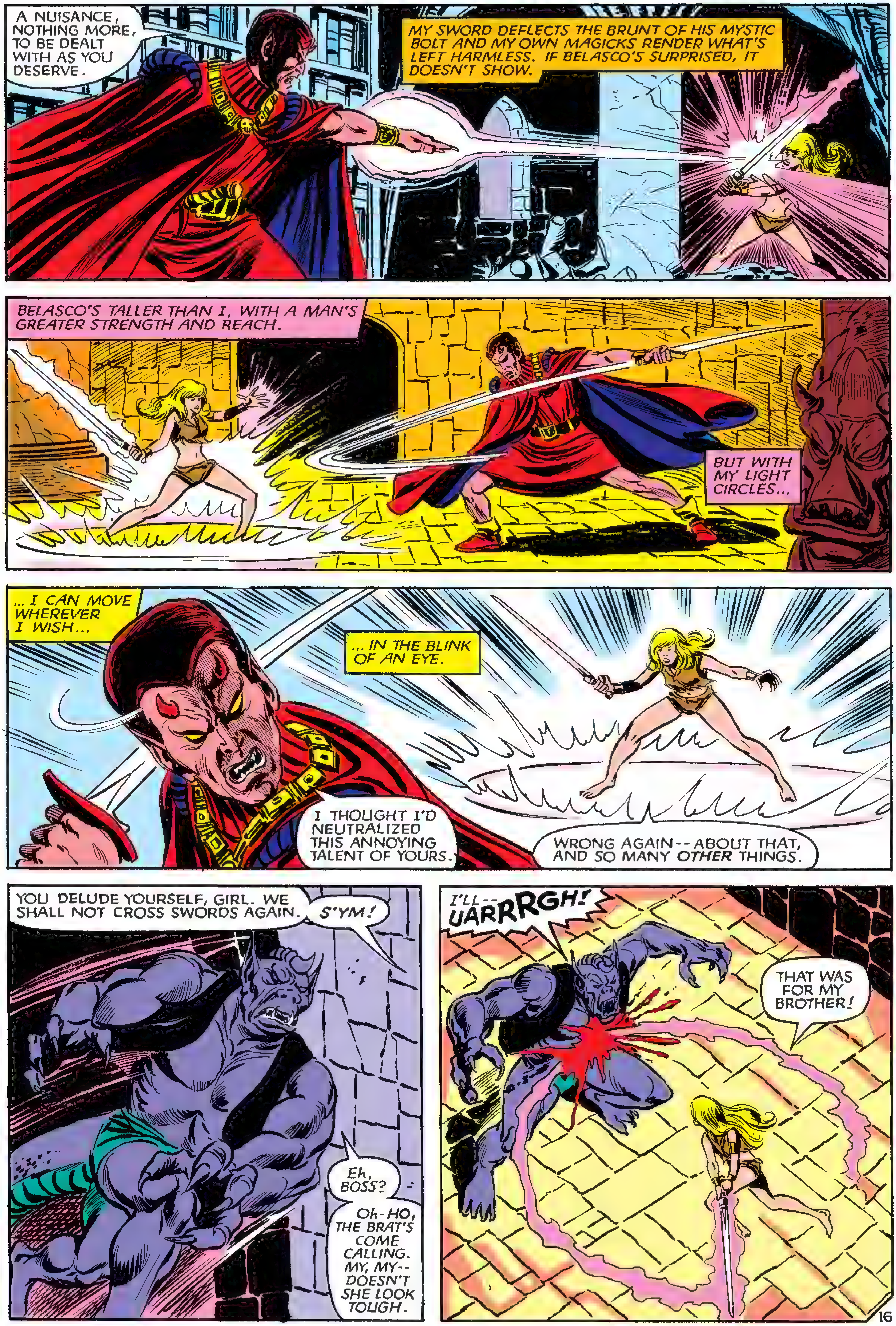

ITS TRUNK IS AS BROAD AS A HOUSE. I CAN USE IT FOR A WINDBREAK. BUT THEN WHAT? DO I STAY LIKE THIS FOREVER?
I WAS BELASCO'S APPRENTICE-- AND BEFORE THEN, ORORO'S AS WELL.
PERHAPS I CAN TAP INTO THE OAK, DRAW SUSTENANCE FROM ITS NATURAL LIFE FORCE.
I EXTEND MY AWARENESS AS ORORO TAUGHT ME, BECOMING ONE WITH THE ANCIENT TREE-- RESISTING THE TEMPTATION TO PLAY WITH ITS ESSENCE, TO TRY TO MAKE THE OAK SOMETHING IT ISN'T--
--AND CAST A PENTAGRAM OF SILVER FIRE AROUND US BOTH.
I'M SHAKING WHEN IT'S DONE--FROM THE EFFORT AND FROM FEAR.
THE BELASCO SIDE OF ME IS STRONGER THAN I THOUGHT.
I MEAN TO FOLLOW ORORO'S LEAD.
I TAKE A PORTION OF MY OWN LIFE FORCE, MANIFESTING IT AS PURE ENERGY...
... AND MIX IT WITH THE NATURAL ELEMENTS AROUND ME...
...TO FORM AN ACORN.
I DID THIS ONCE BEFORE* BUT THAT ACORN ONLY LOOKED PERFECT; INSIDE, IT WAS ROTTEN TO THE CORE.
LIKE ME.
*LAST ISSUE-- L.
THIS ONE IS NO DIFFERENT.

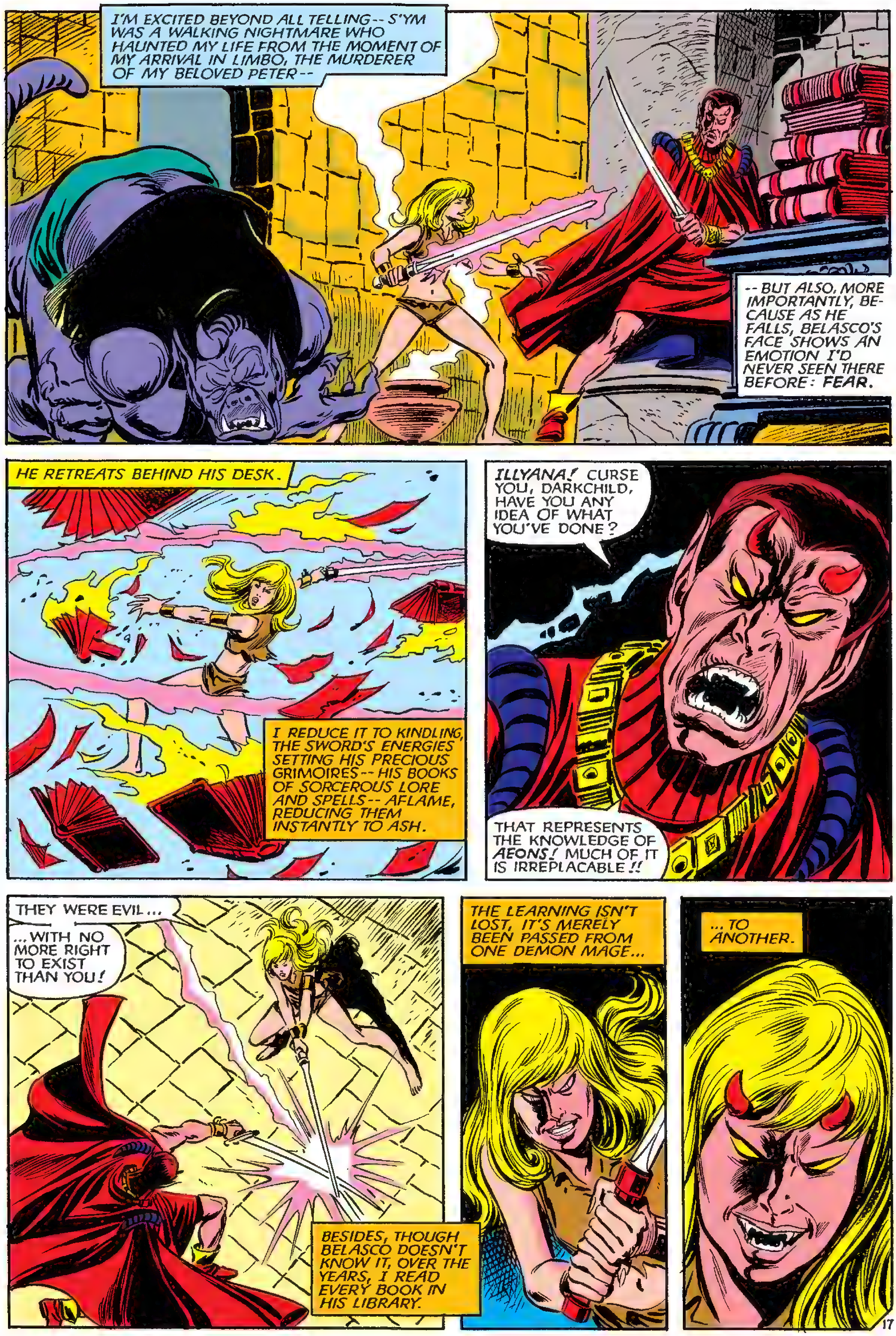

DAYS PASS--WITHOUT CHANGE, WITHOUT END. I'VE NO IDEA HOW MANY.
I GROW A HEAD TALLER AND BECOME AS HARD AS MY WILDERNESS.
FOR AS FAR AS THE EYE CAN SEE, ALL IS DESOLATION--NOTHING BUT ICE AND SNOW, UNMARKED BY ANY LIVING THING, SAVE FOR ME AND THE OAK.
AND SOON, THE OAK WILL BE NO MORE.
EACH TIME I DRAW ON YOUR STRENGTH, OLD FRIEND, FOR SUSTENANCE OR SPELLS, I HASTEN YOUR END. NOW YOU'VE SO LITTLE LEFT TO GIVE.
YOU WERE SO BEAUTIFUL WHEN I FIRST SAW YOU, YOUR MAJESTY TOOK MY BREATH AWAY.
FORGIVE ME.
I NEVER MEAN TO BRING DOOM AND DESTRUCTION TO THOSE I CARE FOR, BUT I ALWAYS DO.
THERE'S NO WIND OR SNOW THIS MORNING, I TAKE THAT AS A FAVORABLE OMEN. PERHAPS THIS TIME, I'LL BE SUCCESSFUL.
THE OAK'S POWER RUSHES THROUGH ME LIKE A FLOOD--WARM AND COMFORTING, MAKING ME GLOW WITH STRENGTH AND VITALITY.
I CAST MY PENTAGRAM...
...CONJURE MY ACORN.
I HAVE SUCH HIGH HOPES.
I SHOULD HAVE KNOWN BETTER.

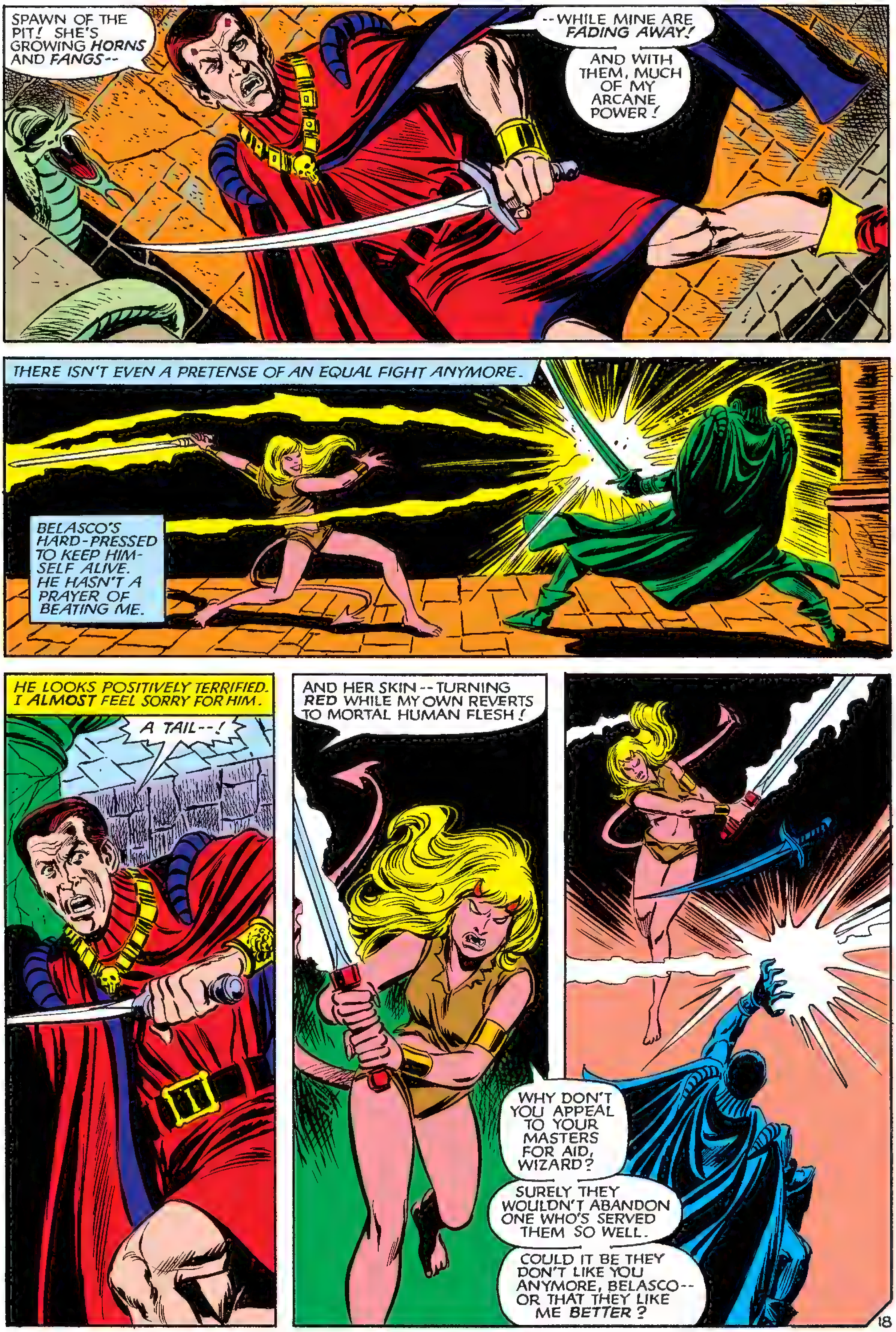

IT'S NO USE.
TRY AS I CAN, WITH ALL MY MIGHT...
...I CAN'T CREATE LIFE, AS ORORO DID. BELASCO'S EVIL IS TOO DEEPLY INGRAINED-- TOO MUCH A PART OF ME-- I'LL NEVER BE RID OF IT.
OH?!?
CRAAK!
THE OAK!?!
I MADE THE SUPREME EFFORT...
... AND ORORO'S TREE, THE SUPREME SACRIFICE.
FOR NOTHING.
AS I WATCH, IT BEGINS TO CRUMBLE TO DUST.
IF BELASCO COULD SEE ME NOW, HOW HE WOULD LAUGH. INDEED, I SEEM TO HEAR HIS VOICE IN THE STILLNESS--MOCKING, TRIUMPHANT.
IT'S MORE THAN I CAN BEAR.
FOR AWHILE, I SEEK REFUGE IN BLIND RAGE.
THEN--THOUGH I DO NOT KNOW IT--IN MADNESS.
WAIT, THINK A MOMENT! ORORO'S MASTER SPELL WAS ONE OF CREATION--HER WAY OF BECOMING ONCE MORE THE WOMAN SHE WAS, OF REAFFIRMING BELIEFS...
...SHE HELD DEARER THAN HER LIFE.

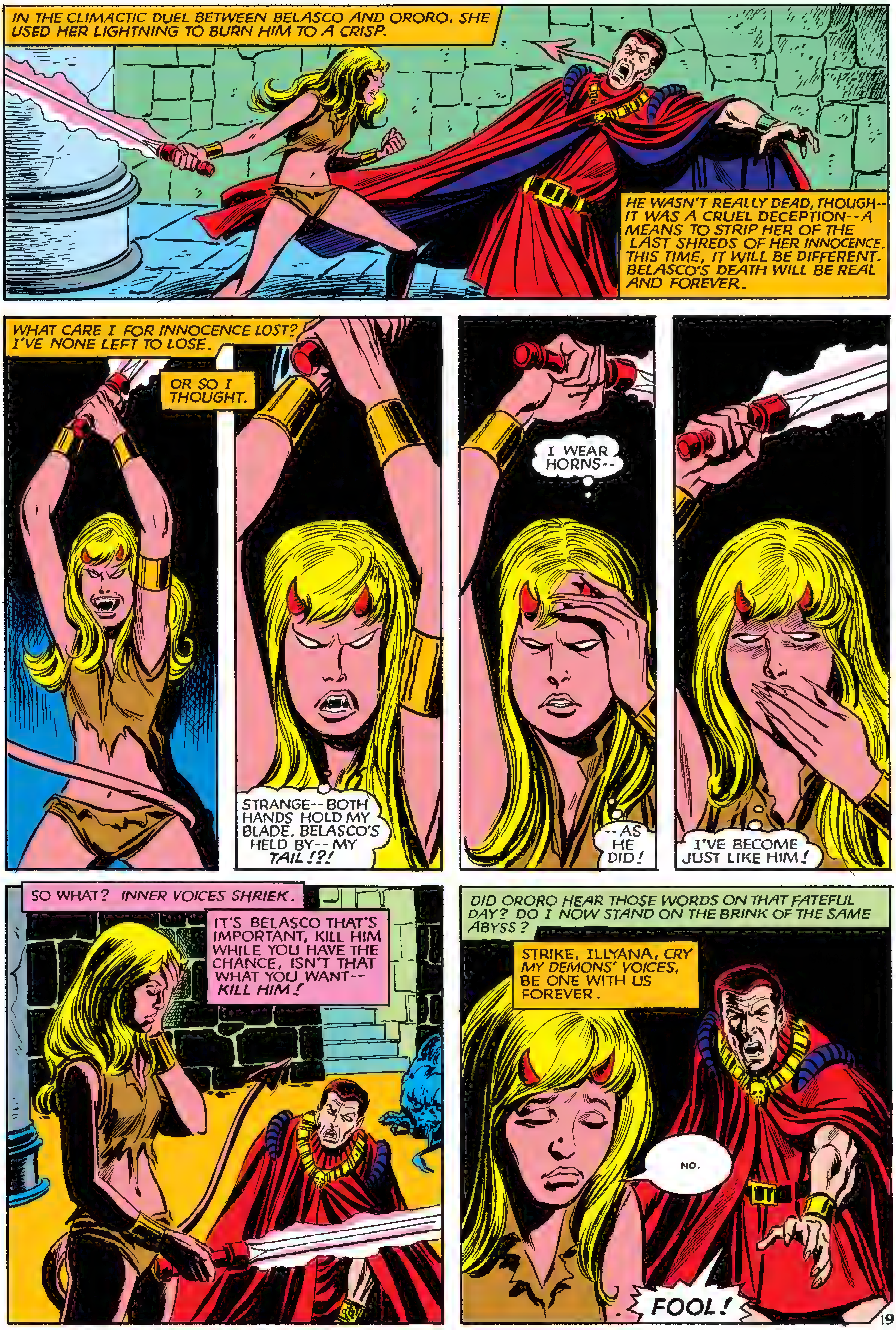

BUT I'M NOT HER!
I WANT VENGEANCE! ORORO CREATED LIFE FOR ITS OWN SAKE. I SOUGHT IT AS A MEANS TO AN END-- THE UTTER DESTRUCTION OF MY TORMENTER.
COULD THAT BE THE ANSWER? NOT A METAPHORICAL WEAPON-- AS ORORO SOUGHT-- BUT THE *REAL THING*?!
I HAVE NOTHING TO LOSE.
I CAST MY MASTER SPELL, USING WHAT REMAINS OF THE STRENGTH I TOOK FROM THE OAK, AND ALL OF MY OWN.
AS I PLUNGE MY HAND INTO THE ENERGY SPHERE...
...AN IMAGE COMES TO MIND--
--OF A ***SWORD!***
IT WAS SO EASY, I PROBABLY COULD HAVE DONE THIS AGES AGO!
WHY DIDN'T I COMPREHEND THIS TRUTH SOONER?! THE OAK NEED NOT HAVE SUFFERED AND DIED, I NEED NOT HAVE ENDURED EXILE IN THIS WINTERY HELL--!
I'M FLUSH WITH POWER. THE MOMENT I GRASPED THE SWORD, I FELT INVINCIBLE. I'M EAGER TO FACE BELASCO-- I WANT TO SEE HOW HE FACES DEATH.
THE ENCHANTMENTS USED TO IMPRISON ME HAVE BEEN SHATTERED-- A LIGHT CIRCLE COMES WHEN I CALL, AND WHISKS ME TO MEET MY DESTINY...

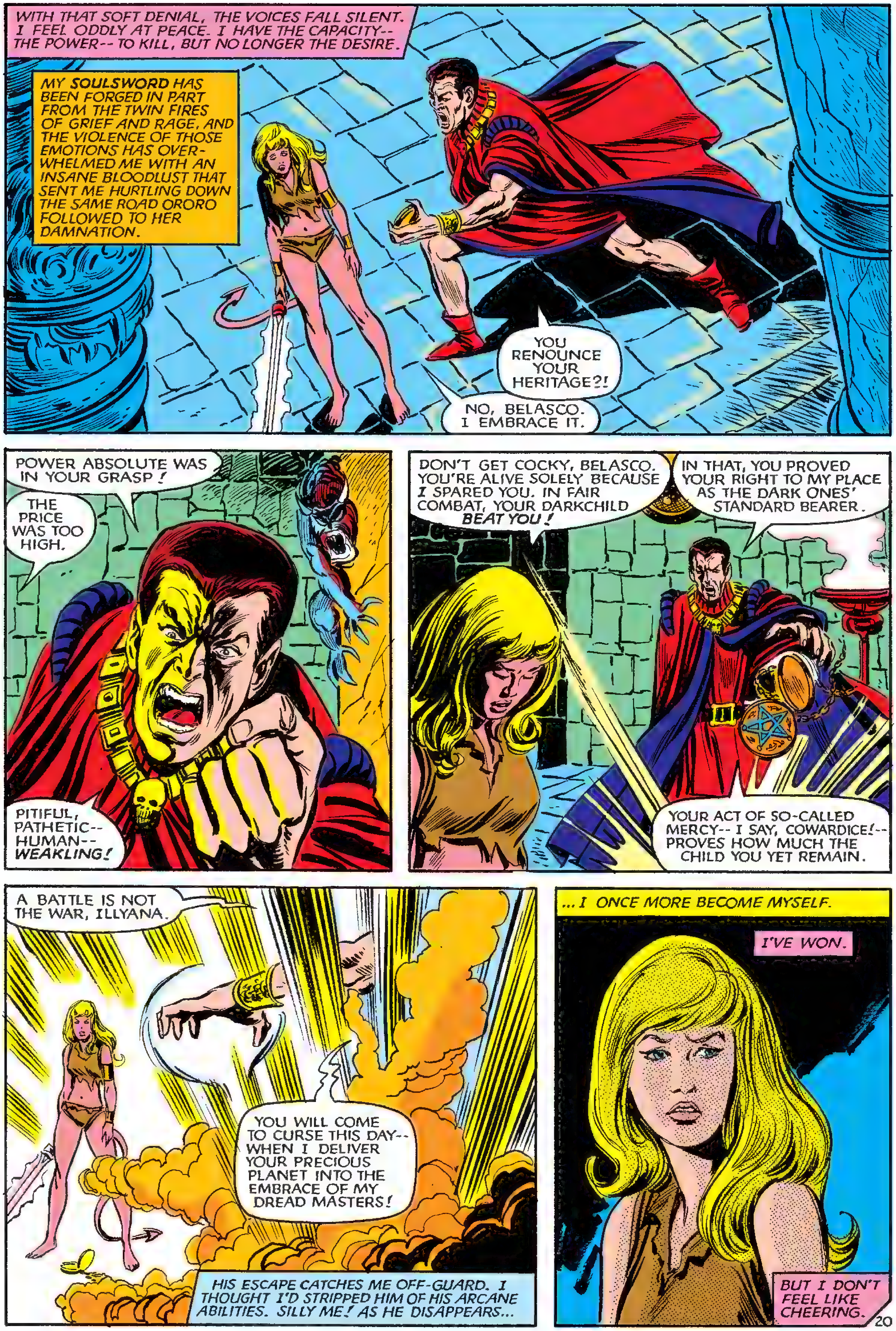

...IN BELASCO'S CITADEL...
SOON, VERY SOON, I WILL BE FREE OF THIS ACCURSED PRISON. HOW IRONIC THAT THOSE WHO CAUSED MY DOWNFALL--THE JUNGLE MAN *KA-ZAR* AND HIS SLUT, *SHANNA THE SHE-DEVIL*--WILL BE PART AND PARCEL OF BOTH MY RESURRECTION AND MY ULTIMATE TRIUMPH!
THE ELDER GODS SENTENCED ME TO LIMBO UNTIL SUCH TIME AS I COULD FIND MY OWN WAY OUT. ORIGINALLY, MY INTENTION WAS TO UTILIZE *ILLYANA RASPUTIN* AS A MEANS TO THAT END. BUT THIS IS SO MUCH MORE DELICIOUS.
MY ENCHANTMENTS ARE ALREADY MANIPULATING THE ATLANTEAN ANDROID, *DHERK*. I NEED ONLY RESTORE *QUEEN LEANNE* OF LEMURIA TO A SEMBLANCE OF HEALTH, AND ALL WILL BE READY! *
* *KA-ZAR* #29 --L.
BELASCO!
REMEMBER ME?

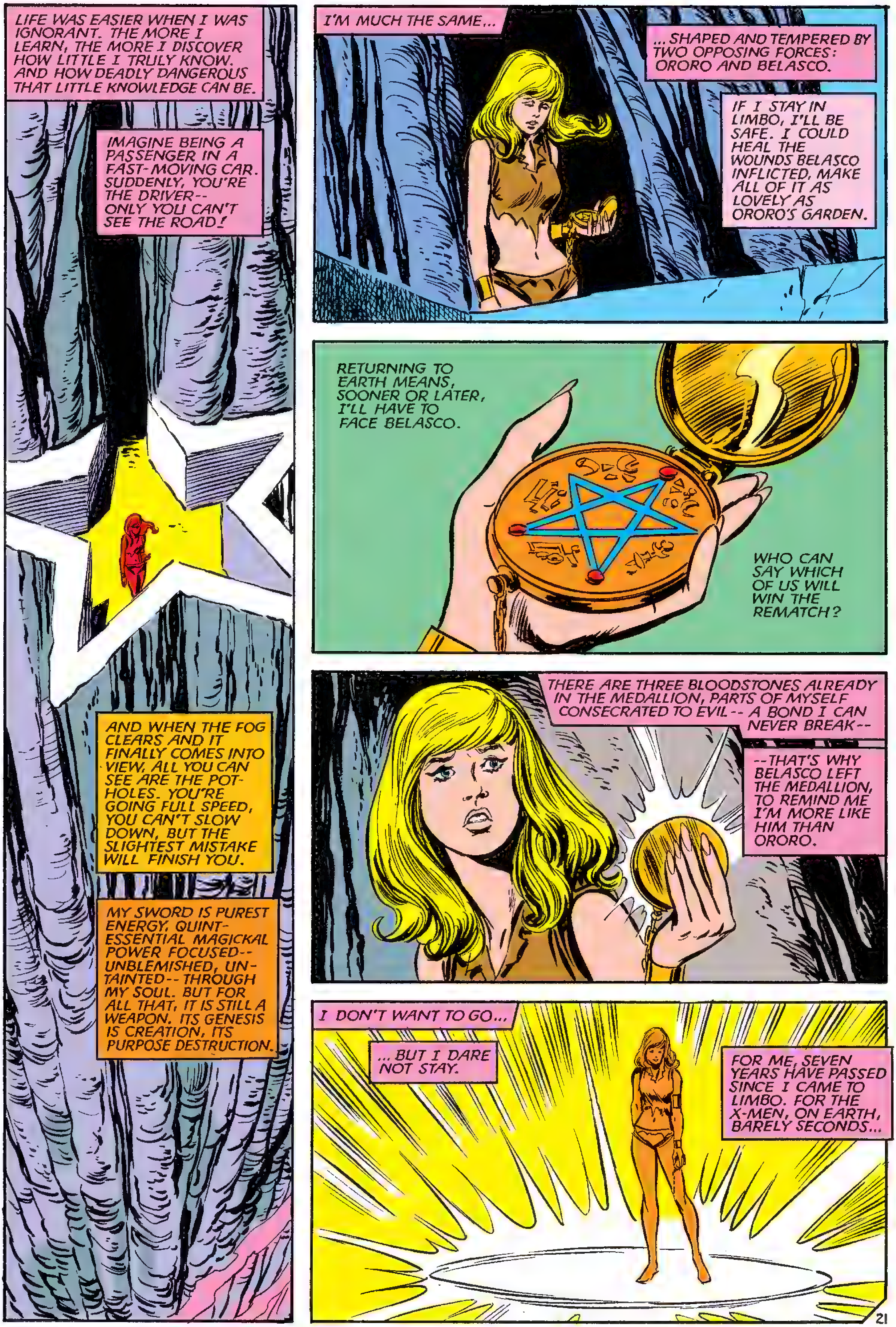

A NUISANCE, NOTHING MORE, TO BE DEALT WITH AS YOU DESERVE.
MY SWORD DEFLECTS THE BRUNT OF HIS MYSTIC BOLT AND MY OWN MAGICKS RENDER WHAT'S LEFT HARMLESS. IF BELASCO'S SURPRISED, IT DOESN'T SHOW.
BELASCO'S TALLER THAN I, WITH A MAN'S GREATER STRENGTH AND REACH.
BUT WITH MY LIGHT CIRCLES...
...I CAN MOVE WHEREVER I WISH...
...IN THE BLINK OF AN EYE.
I THOUGHT I'D NEUTRALIZED THIS ANNOYING TALENT OF YOURS.
WRONG AGAIN--ABOUT THAT, AND SO MANY *OTHER* THINGS.
YOU DELUDE YOURSELF, GIRL. WE SHALL NOT CROSS SWORDS AGAIN.
S'YM!
Eh, BOSS?
Oh-HO, THE BRAT'S COME CALLING. MY, MY-- DOESN'T SHE LOOK TOUGH.
I'LL-- UARRRGH!
THAT WAS FOR MY BROTHER!

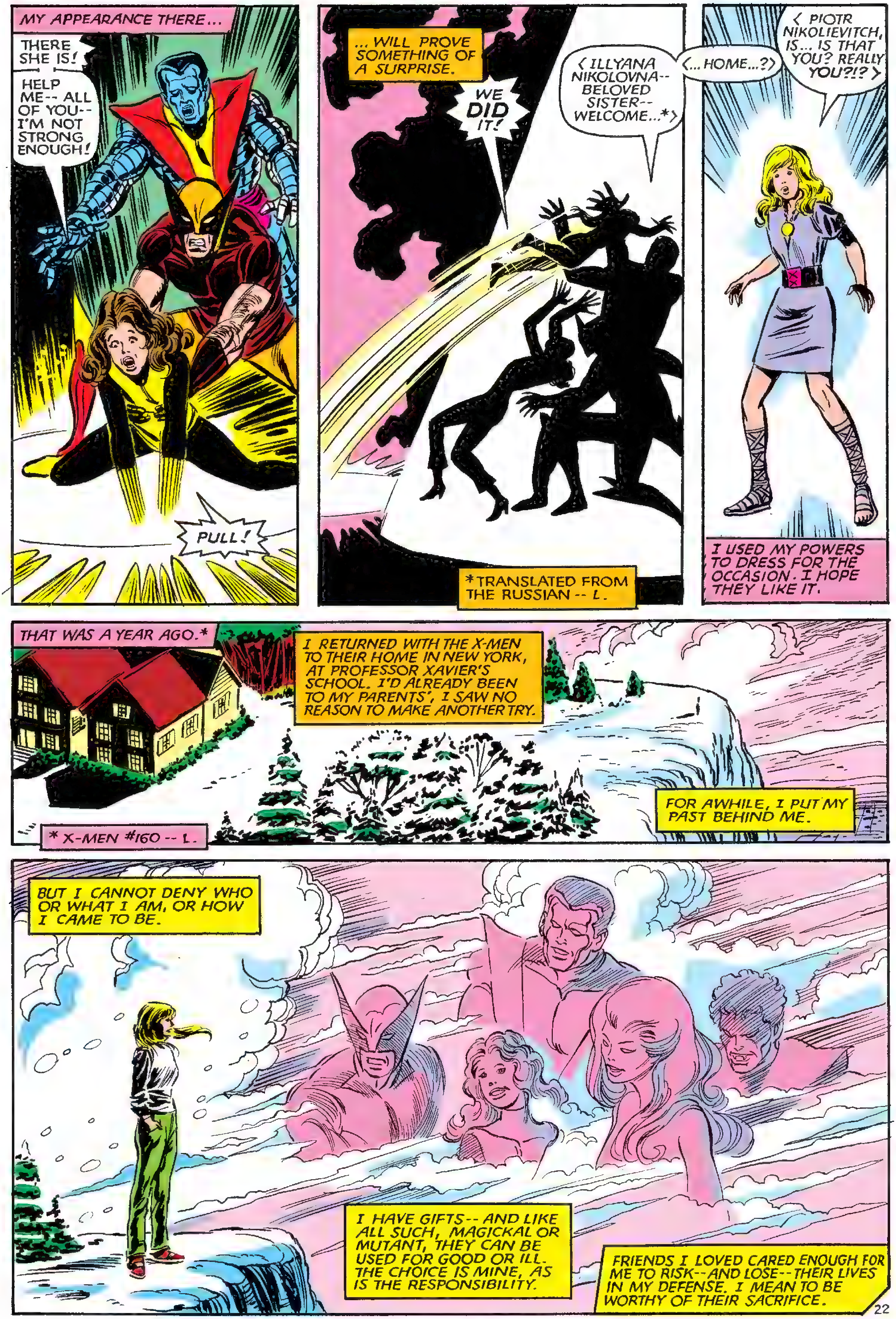

I'M EXCITED BEYOND ALL TELLING-- S'YM WAS A WALKING NIGHTMARE WHO HAUNTED MY LIFE FROM THE MOMENT OF MY ARRIVAL IN LIMBO, THE MURDERER OF MY BELOVED PETER--
-- BUT ALSO, MORE IMPORTANTLY, BECAUSE AS HE FALLS, BELASCO'S FACE SHOWS AN EMOTION I'D NEVER SEEN THERE BEFORE: **FEAR.**
HE RETREATS BEHIND HIS DESK.
I REDUCE IT TO KINDLING, THE SWORD'S ENERGIES SETTING HIS PRECIOUS GRIMOIRES-- HIS BOOKS OF SORCEROUS LORE AND SPELLS-- AFLAME, REDUCING THEM INSTANTLY TO ASH.
ILLYANA! CURSE YOU, DARKCHILD, HAVE YOU ANY IDEA OF WHAT YOU'VE DONE?
THAT REPRESENTS THE KNOWLEDGE OF *AEONS!* MUCH OF IT IS IRREPLACABLE!!
THEY WERE EVIL...
...WITH NO MORE RIGHT TO EXIST THAN YOU!
BESIDES, THOUGH BELASCO DOESN'T KNOW IT, OVER THE YEARS, I READ EVERY BOOK IN HIS LIBRARY.
THE LEARNING ISN'T LOST, IT'S MERELY BEEN PASSED FROM ONE DEMON MAGE...
...TO ANOTHER.

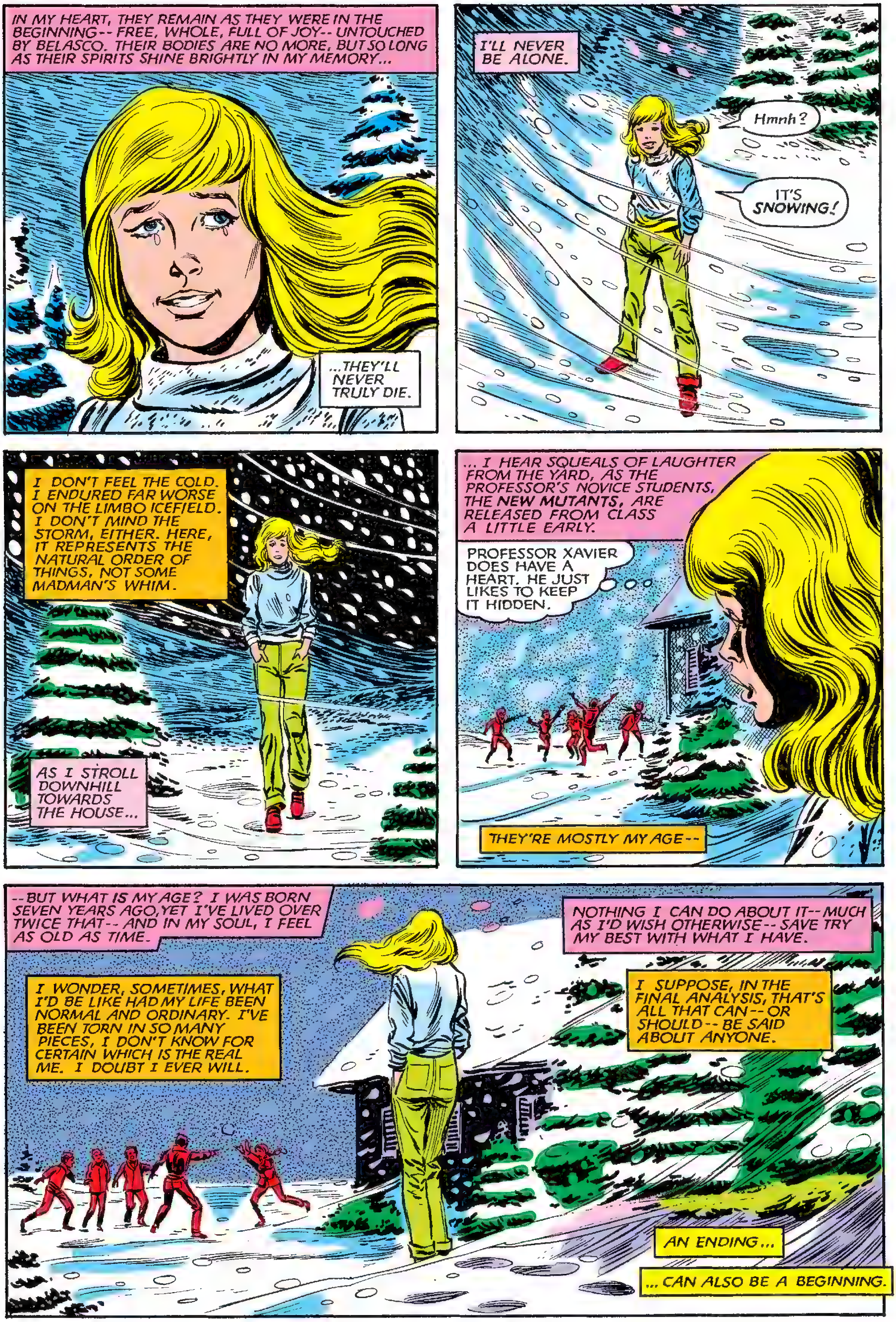

SPAWN OF THE PIT! SHE'S GROWING **HORNS** AND *FANGS*--
--WHILE MINE ARE *FADING AWAY!*
AND WITH THEM, MUCH OF MY ARCANE POWER!
THERE ISN'T EVEN A PRETENSE OF AN EQUAL FIGHT ANYMORE.
BELASCO'S HARD-PRESSED TO KEEP HIMSELF ALIVE. HE HASN'T A PRAYER OF BEATING ME.
HE LOOKS POSITIVELY TERRIFIED. I *ALMOST* FEEL SORRY FOR HIM.
A TAIL--!
AND HER SKIN--TURNING **RED** WHILE MY OWN REVERTS TO MORTAL HUMAN FLESH!
WHY DON'T YOU APPEAL TO YOUR MASTERS FOR AID, WIZARD?
SURELY THEY WOULDN'T ABANDON ONE WHO'S SERVED THEM SO WELL.
COULD IT BE THEY DON'T LIKE YOU ANYMORE, BELASCO--OR THAT THEY LIKE ME *BETTER*?


IN THE CLIMACTIC DUEL BETWEEN BELASCO AND ORORO, SHE USED HER LIGHTNING TO BURN HIM TO A CRISP.
HE WASN'T REALLY DEAD, THOUGH-- IT WAS A CRUEL DECEPTION-- A MEANS TO STRIP HER OF THE LAST SHREDS OF HER INNOCENCE. THIS TIME, IT WILL BE DIFFERENT. BELASCO'S DEATH WILL BE REAL AND FOREVER.
WHAT CARE I FOR INNOCENCE LOST? I'VE NONE LEFT TO LOSE.
OR SO I THOUGHT.
STRANGE-- BOTH HANDS HOLD MY BLADE. BELASCO'S HELD BY-- MY *TAIL!?!*
I WEAR HORNS--
--AS HE DID!
I'VE BECOME JUST LIKE HIM!
SO WHAT? INNER VOICES SHRIEK.
IT'S BELASCO THAT'S IMPORTANT, KILL HIM WHILE YOU HAVE THE CHANCE, ISN'T THAT WHAT YOU WANT-- *KILL HIM!*
DID ORORO HEAR THOSE WORDS ON THAT FATEFUL DAY? DO I NOW STAND ON THE BRINK OF THE SAME ABYSS?
STRIKE, ILLYANA, CRY *MY DEMONS' VOICES*, BE ONE WITH US FOREVER.
NO.
FOOL!


WITH THAT SOFT DENIAL, THE VOICES FALL SILENT. I FEEL ODDLY AT PEACE. I HAVE THE CAPACITY-- THE POWER-- TO KILL, BUT NO LONGER THE DESIRE.
MY **SOULSWORD** HAS BEEN FORGED IN PART FROM THE TWIN FIRES OF GRIEF AND RAGE, AND THE VIOLENCE OF THOSE EMOTIONS HAS OVERWHELMED ME WITH AN INSANE BLOODLUST THAT SENT ME HURTLING DOWN THE SAME ROAD ORORO FOLLOWED TO HER DAMNATION.
YOU RENOUNCE YOUR HERITAGE?!
NO, BELASCO. I EMBRACE IT.
POWER ABSOLUTE WAS IN YOUR GRASP!
THE PRICE WAS TOO HIGH.
PITIFUL, PATHETIC-- HUMAN-- **WEAKLING!**
DON'T GET COCKY, BELASCO. YOU'RE ALIVE SOLELY BECAUSE *I* SPARED YOU. IN FAIR COMBAT, YOUR DARKCHILD ***BEAT YOU!***
IN THAT, YOU PROVED YOUR RIGHT TO MY PLACE AS THE DARK ONES' STANDARD BEARER.
YOUR ACT OF SO-CALLED MERCY-- I SAY, COWARDICE!-- PROVES HOW MUCH THE CHILD YOU YET REMAIN.
A BATTLE IS NOT THE WAR, ILLYANA.
YOU WILL COME TO CURSE THIS DAY-- WHEN I DELIVER YOUR PRECIOUS PLANET INTO THE EMBRACE OF MY DREAD MASTERS!
HIS ESCAPE CATCHES ME OFF-GUARD. I THOUGHT I'D STRIPPED HIM OF HIS ARCANE ABILITIES. SILLY ME! AS HE DISAPPEARS...
...I ONCE MORE BECOME MYSELF.
I'VE WON.
BUT I DON'T FEEL LIKE CHEERING.


LIFE WAS EASIER WHEN I WAS IGNORANT. THE MORE I LEARN, THE MORE I DISCOVER HOW LITTLE I TRULY KNOW. AND HOW DEADLY DANGEROUS THAT LITTLE KNOWLEDGE CAN BE.
IMAGINE BEING A PASSENGER IN A FAST-MOVING CAR. SUDDENLY, YOU'RE THE DRIVER-- ONLY YOU CAN'T SEE THE ROAD!
AND WHEN THE FOG CLEARS AND IT FINALLY COMES INTO VIEW, ALL YOU CAN SEE ARE THE POTHOLES. YOU'RE GOING FULL SPEED, YOU CAN'T SLOW DOWN, BUT THE SLIGHTEST MISTAKE WILL FINISH YOU.
MY SWORD IS PUREST ENERGY, QUINTESSENTIAL MAGICKAL POWER FOCUSED-- UNBLEMISHED, UNTAINTED-- THROUGH MY SOUL. BUT FOR ALL THAT, IT IS STILL A WEAPON. ITS GENESIS IS CREATION, ITS PURPOSE DESTRUCTION.
I'M MUCH THE SAME...
...SHAPED AND TEMPERED BY TWO OPPOSING FORCES: ORORO AND BELASCO.
IF I STAY IN LIMBO, I'LL BE SAFE. I COULD HEAL THE WOUNDS BELASCO INFLICTED, MAKE ALL OF IT AS LOVELY AS ORORO'S GARDEN.
RETURNING TO EARTH MEANS, SOONER OR LATER, I'LL HAVE TO FACE BELASCO.
WHO CAN SAY WHICH OF US WILL WIN THE REMATCH?
THERE ARE THREE BLOODSTONES ALREADY IN THE MEDALLION, PARTS OF MYSELF CONSECRATED TO EVIL-- A BOND I CAN NEVER BREAK--
--THAT'S WHY BELASCO LEFT THE MEDALLION, TO REMIND ME I'M MORE LIKE HIM THAN ORORO.
I DON'T WANT TO GO...
...BUT I DARE NOT STAY.
FOR ME, SEVEN YEARS HAVE PASSED SINCE I CAME TO LIMBO. FOR THE X-MEN, ON EARTH, BARELY SECONDS...


MY APPEARANCE THERE...
THERE SHE IS!
HELP ME-- ALL OF YOU-- I'M NOT STRONG ENOUGH!
PULL!
...WILL PROVE SOMETHING OF A SURPRISE.
WE DID IT!
< ILLYANA NIKOLOVNA-- BELOVED SISTER-- WELCOME...*>
<...HOME...?>
< PIOTR NIKOLIEVITCH, IS... IS THAT YOU? REALLY YOU?!? >
*TRANSLATED FROM THE RUSSIAN -- L.
I USED MY POWERS TO DRESS FOR THE OCCASION. I HOPE THEY LIKE IT.
THAT WAS A YEAR AGO.*
I RETURNED WITH THE X-MEN TO THEIR HOME IN NEW YORK, AT PROFESSOR XAVIER'S SCHOOL. I'D ALREADY BEEN TO MY PARENTS', I SAW NO REASON TO MAKE ANOTHER TRY.
FOR AWHILE, I PUT MY PAST BEHIND ME.
* X-MEN #160 -- L.
BUT I CANNOT DENY WHO OR WHAT I AM, OR HOW I CAME TO BE.
I HAVE GIFTS-- AND LIKE ALL SUCH, MAGICKAL OR MUTANT, THEY CAN BE USED FOR GOOD OR ILL. THE CHOICE IS MINE, AS IS THE RESPONSIBILITY.
FRIENDS I LOVED CARED ENOUGH FOR ME TO RISK--AND LOSE--THEIR LIVES IN MY DEFENSE. I MEAN TO BE WORTHY OF THEIR SACRIFICE.


IN MY HEART, THEY REMAIN AS THEY WERE IN THE BEGINNING-- FREE, WHOLE, FULL OF JOY-- UNTOUCHED BY BELASCO. THEIR BODIES ARE NO MORE, BUT SO LONG AS THEIR SPIRITS SHINE BRIGHTLY IN MY MEMORY...
...THEY'LL NEVER TRULY DIE.
I'LL NEVER BE ALONE.
Hmnh?
IT'S SNOWING!
I DON'T FEEL THE COLD. I ENDURED FAR WORSE ON THE LIMBO ICEFIELD. I DON'T MIND THE STORM, EITHER. HERE, IT REPRESENTS THE NATURAL ORDER OF THINGS, NOT SOME MADMAN'S WHIM.
AS I STROLL DOWNHILL TOWARDS THE HOUSE...
...I HEAR SQUEALS OF LAUGHTER FROM THE YARD, AS THE PROFESSOR'S NOVICE STUDENTS, THE NEW MUTANTS, ARE RELEASED FROM CLASS A LITTLE EARLY.
PROFESSOR XAVIER DOES HAVE A HEART. HE JUST LIKES TO KEEP IT HIDDEN.
THEY'RE MOSTLY MY AGE--
--BUT WHAT IS MY AGE? I WAS BORN SEVEN YEARS AGO, YET I'VE LIVED OVER TWICE THAT-- AND IN MY SOUL, I FEEL AS OLD AS TIME.
I WONDER, SOMETIMES, WHAT I'D BE LIKE HAD MY LIFE BEEN NORMAL AND ORDINARY. I'VE BEEN TORN IN SO MANY PIECES, I DON'T KNOW FOR CERTAIN WHICH IS THE REAL ME. I DOUBT I EVER WILL.
NOTHING I CAN DO ABOUT IT-- MUCH AS I'D WISH OTHERWISE-- SAVE TRY MY BEST WITH WHAT I HAVE.
I SUPPOSE, IN THE FINAL ANALYSIS, THAT'S ALL THAT CAN-- OR SHOULD-- BE SAID ABOUT ANYONE.
AN ENDING...
...CAN ALSO BE A BEGINNING.

Official Handbook of the Marvel Universe: Deluxe Edition #7 — main-image art by Mary Wilshire & Josef Rubinstein

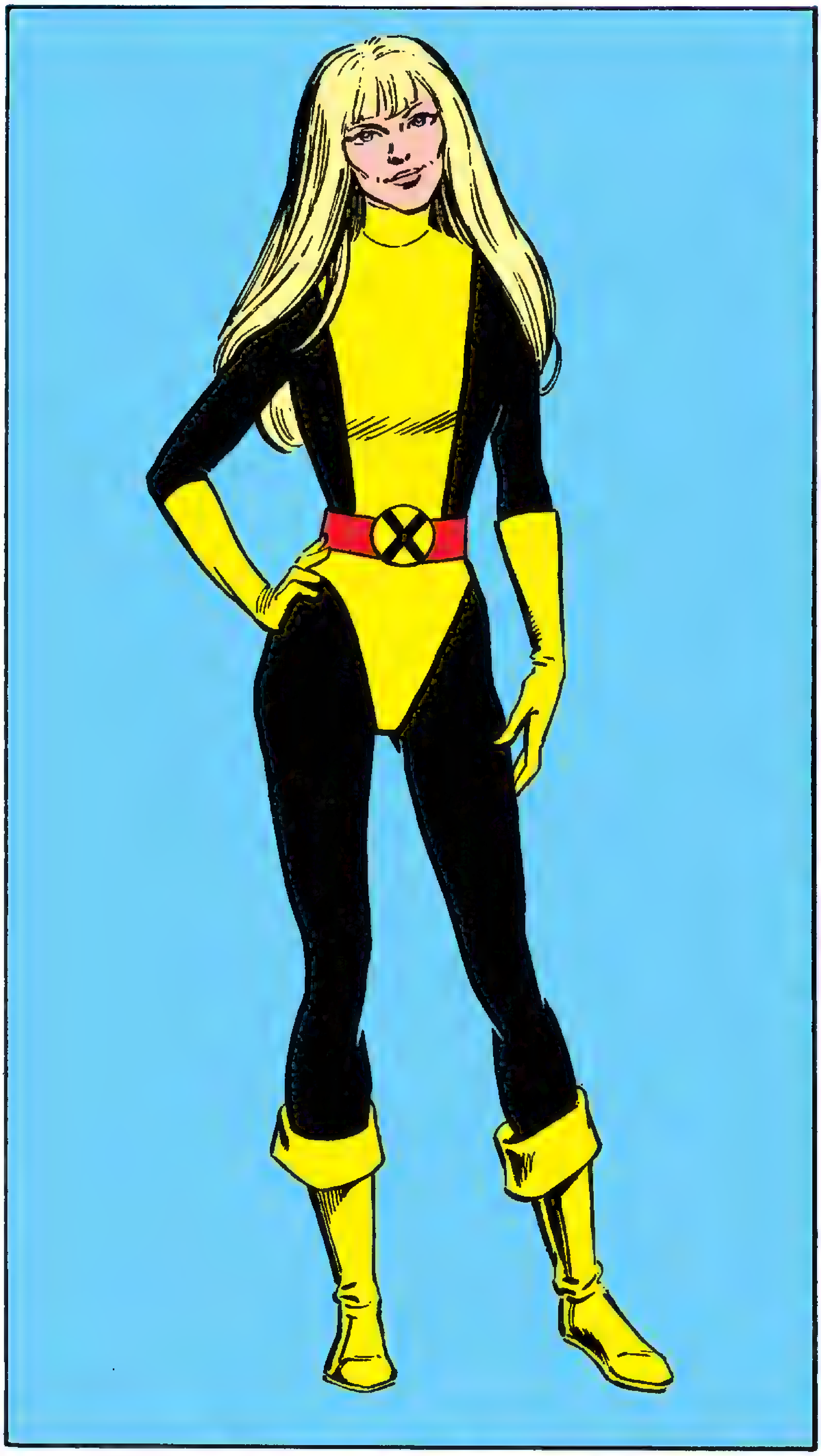
MAGIK

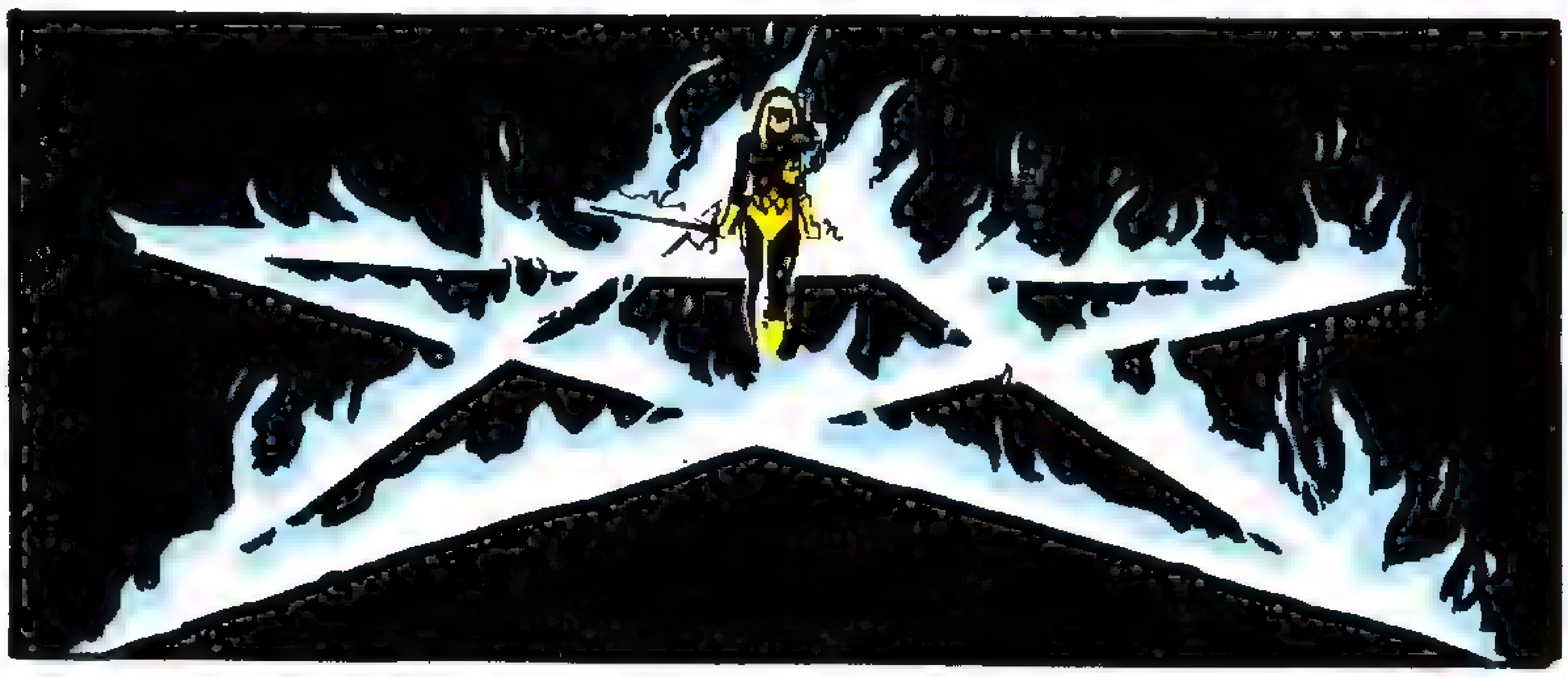
Real Name: Illyana Nikolievna Rasputin (Anglicized from Rasputina, the correct feminine form of her last name in Russian)
Occupation: Student
Identity: Secret
Legal status: Citizen of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, now living in the United States under a special visa, no criminal record, still a minor
Other aliases: None
Place of birth: Ust-Ordynski Collective, near Lake Baikal, Siberia, U.S.S.R.
Marital status: Single
Known relatives: Nikolai Rasputin (father), Alexandra Rasputina (mother), Piotr (Peter) Rasputin (brother), Mikhail Rasputin (brother, deceased)
Group affiliation: New Mutants
Base of operations: Professor Charles Xavier's School for Gifted Youngsters, Salem Center, Westchester County, New York, also Limbo
First appearance: (as child) GIANT-SIZE X-MEN #1, (as adolescent) X-MEN #160
Origin: (as Magik) MAGIK #1–4

History: Illyana Rasputin is the younger sister of Piotr (Peter) Rasputin, who left their home at the Ust-Ordynski collective farm in Siberia when Illyana was quite young to become Colossus, one of the team of mutant adventurers called the X-Men (see *Colossus, X-Men*). A few years later Illyana was somehow abducted from the Soviet Union through the machinations of the woman known only as Miss Locke, the assistant to the eccentric assassin Arcade (see *Arcade*). Arcade was being held captive by one of Doctor Doom's robotic duplicates, and Miss Locke took Illyana and other people dear to the X-Men hostage in order to force the X-Men to go to Arcade's rescue (see *Doctor Doom*). The main team of X-Men battled the Doom robot and obtained Arcade's release, and a team of reserve members of the X-Men freed Illyana and her fellow captives from Miss Locke. Unwilling to risk the dangers as a defector of returning to the Soviet Union to bring the now seven-year-old Illyana back to her parents, Peter Rasputin decided to have Illyana stay with him at the X-Men's Westchester headquarters.

Some months later the sorcerer Belasco brought Illyana and the X-Men to his extradimensional realm which he called limbo (see *Belasco, Limbo*). A group of X-Men from a divergent Earth had come to Belasco's limbo earlier, but most of them had been killed there. The sole survivors had been Kitty Pryde, who had become an adult there named Cat, and Storm, who had also grown older, lost her power to control the weather, and become a sorceress (see *Shadowcat, Storm*). As the X-Men of our Earth escaped back to Earth, Belasco seized Illyana's arm. The Kitty Pryde of our Earth seized Illyana's other arm but Belasco ripped Illyana from Pryde's grasp, and held her captive in limbo.

Belasco turned a portion of Illyana's soul demonic in nature, giving that part of her a strong tendency towards what humanity considers evil. This part of her soul is what Illyana calls her "darksoul." In the process Belasco also conjured a "bloodstone" from Illyana's soul and placed it within the so-called Beatrice Medallion. If and when Belasco conjured five bloodstones for the medallion, Illyana, who would then be the Darkchilde, entirely demonic in nature, would serve as the means by which Belasco's masters, the demonic Elder Gods,





would invade and conquer the Earth and its entire universe.

Belasco's spell also gave Illyana's darksoul considerable sorcerous power. The sorceress Storm took Illyana under her wing, hoping to teach her how to combat Belasco's evil influence. Storm gave Illyana her first lesson in how to utilize magic. However, Cat feared that the more Illyana learned of magic, the easier it would prove for Belasco to corrupt her. Therefore, Cat took Illyana from Storm, and taught her how to fight. Years before Belasco had transformed Cat, giving her certain inhuman catlike physical charactersitics. When Illyana was physically nine years old, Belasco transformed Cat even further, giving her a catlike consciousness and putting her under his control. Belasco then made Illyana his apprentice in sorcery.

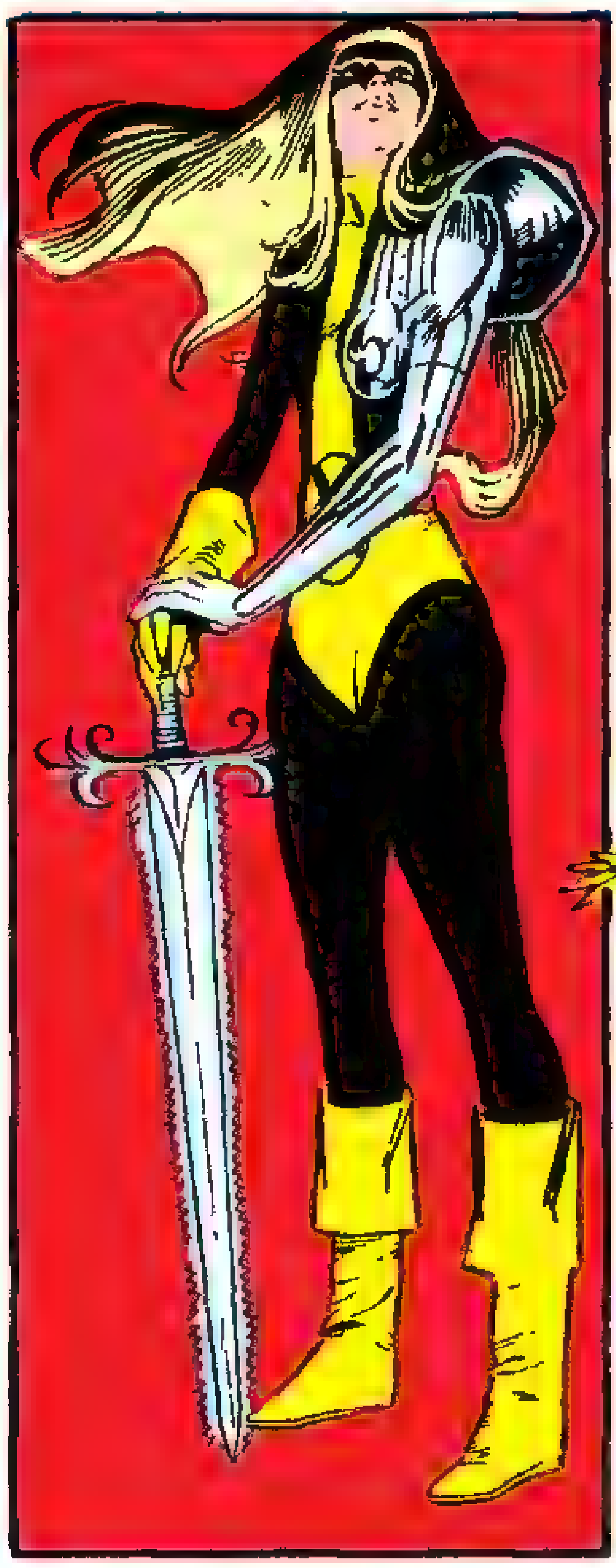
The demonic side of Illyana's soul reveled in serving Belasco, and his influence over her grew continually stronger, no matter how hard she resisted. But her true, good personality remained in control, and as she studied Belasco's magic books, she searched for a means to destroy him. Years after becoming his apprentice, Illyana discovered her own mutant power to create energy discs by which she could teleport herself through space and time.

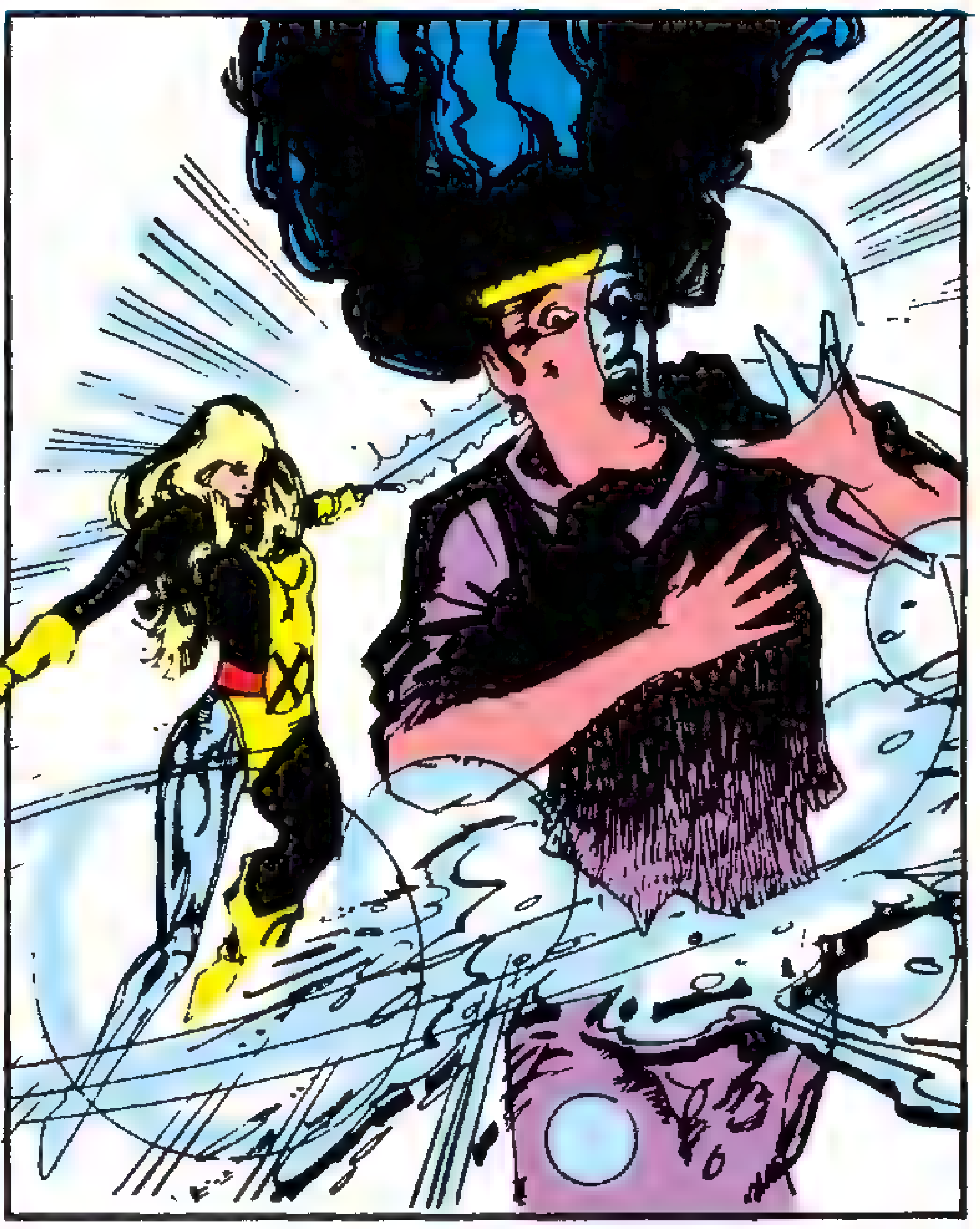
Storm finally fought Belasco in an attempt to save Illyana, but Belasco had Cat wound Storm. Horrified, Illyana tried to keep Cat away from Storm, and Belasco, displeased, ordered Cat to attack Illyana. Illyana found herself forced to kill Cat to save herself.

Belasco had already conjured a second bloodstone from Illyana's soul. He now conjured the third and intended to sacrifice Storm's soul to the Elder Gods. Illyana killed Storm as the only means of saving her from this dreadful fate. Finally, Illyana, who had mastered the magic in Belasco's books, did battle with Belasco himself. She used her weapon, her newly formed soulsword, the ultimate expression of her mystical power. As the two battled, Illyana grew mentally and physically more demonic, while Belasco reverted to human form, losing much of his power. Illyana nearly killed Belasco with the soulsword, but decided instead to let him live, and not to give in to her demonic side. She drove Belasco from limbo and regained her human form.

Illyana then returned to Earth at long last, at a point only seconds after the X-Men's escape from limbo. However, whereas only seconds had passed for the X-Men, Illyana had aged seven years in limbo, time having passed more quickly for her there than it did on Earth due to limbo's unknown temporal laws. (Although Illyana aged seven years in limbo, it is unclear whether she actually spent the equivalent of seven years there; Illyana herself has stated that she had difficulty keeping track of time there.) Illyana was now fourteen years old, and turned fifteen shortly afterwards. Belasco's principal demon servant, S'ym, followed Illyana to Earth but Illyana defeated him in battle and demanded he renounce Belasco (see *Appendix: S'ym*). S'ym did so, and from that time forward Illyana was undisputed master of Belasco's limbo. However, Illyana prefers to live on Earth, where she has become a member of the New Mutants, a group consisting mostly of adolescent mutants being trained in the use of their powers (see *New Mutants*). Illyana has taken the code name Magik and is the best friend of X-Man Kitty Pryde.

Height: 5' 5"





Weight: 120 lbs.
Eyes: Blue
Hair: Blonde
Strength level: Magik possesses the normal human strength of a woman of her physical age, height, and build who engages in moderate regular exercise.
Known superhuman powers: Magik is both a superhumanly powerful mutant and a highly expert sorceress.

Magik's mutant power is the ability to teleport herself and others through time and space by creating "stepping discs" of an unknown form of energy. If she teleports herself or someone else from one place on Earth to another, the person being teleported passes through Magik's limbo in the process. Magik can also teleport herself or someone else into her limbo or out of it. Apparently she can mentally scan her limbo while on Earth in order to locate whoever she wishes to teleport to Earth from it.

Magik has succeeded in teleporting herself and another person across a continent on one occasion, and across centuries in time on another. However, Magik has not yet mastered her teleportational ability. The greater the distance over which she teleports, the greater the possible margin of error in terms of her arriving at the point in time she desires. Hence, when she once teleported herself and a friend from New York State to California, hoping to arrive within seconds of the time she left and her friend instead arrived one week later, having accidentally traveled into the future. Magik is continuously practicing the use of her teleportational power in order to master it.

Magik is the sorceress supreme of her limbo dimension. The extent of her powers there has yet to be defined, but she can probably cast any magic spell that Belasco could, having had access to his store of sorcerous knowledge. For unknown reasons, Magik's magical abilities are far more limited in Earth's dimension. On Earth she can perform astral projection and sense mystical presences. However, her magical powers on Earth are primarily limited to the use of her soulsword, which is the ultimate embodiment of her mystical might. The soulsword will have no physical effect on a non supernatural creature; it will pass right through such a creature as if it were intangible. However, the soulsword can release a non-supernatural being from any magical spell that it is under. Moreover, the soulsword can physically injure and even kill a supernatural being such as a demon.

The more that Magik uses her magical power on any occasion, the more mystical armor appears on her body. The nature and origin of this armor is as yet unknown.

For unknown reason, the soulsword can physically injure Kitty Pryde, alias Shadowcat, even when she is using her phasing power to become intangible. Pryde is also the only known person other than Magik who can wield the soulsword effectively. When Pryde does so, Magik's armor begins to appear on Pryde's body. Moreover, when the Beyonder once freed Illyana from the influence of her darksoul, Pryde gained the ability to produce and wield the soulsword (see *Deceased: Beyonder*). Illyana later took the darksoul influence back upon herself in order that she could again wield the soulsword to save Pryde's life from a demon. The reason for the mystical connection between Illyana Rasputin and Kitty Pryde, each of whom is the other's best friend, is unknown.

Base of operations: Magik is the mistress of a dimension she calls limbo. The word "limbo" is frequently used to describe interdimensional voids. Magik's limbo is not such a void, but is probably a small pocket dimension that is tenuously connected to True Limbo, where time does not pass in a physical sense and, as a result, no one can age or die. Time does pass in a physical sense in Magik's limbo, and she aged seven years during her first sojourn there. However, one might spend years in Magik's limbo while no more than moments pass on Earth, due to the unknown temporal laws of the former place. The matter within Magik's limbo can be shaped and transformed by the thoughts and emotions of the sorcerer who is its master.

Magik's limbo is populated by demons who serve its master. The principal demon is known as S'ym.

■

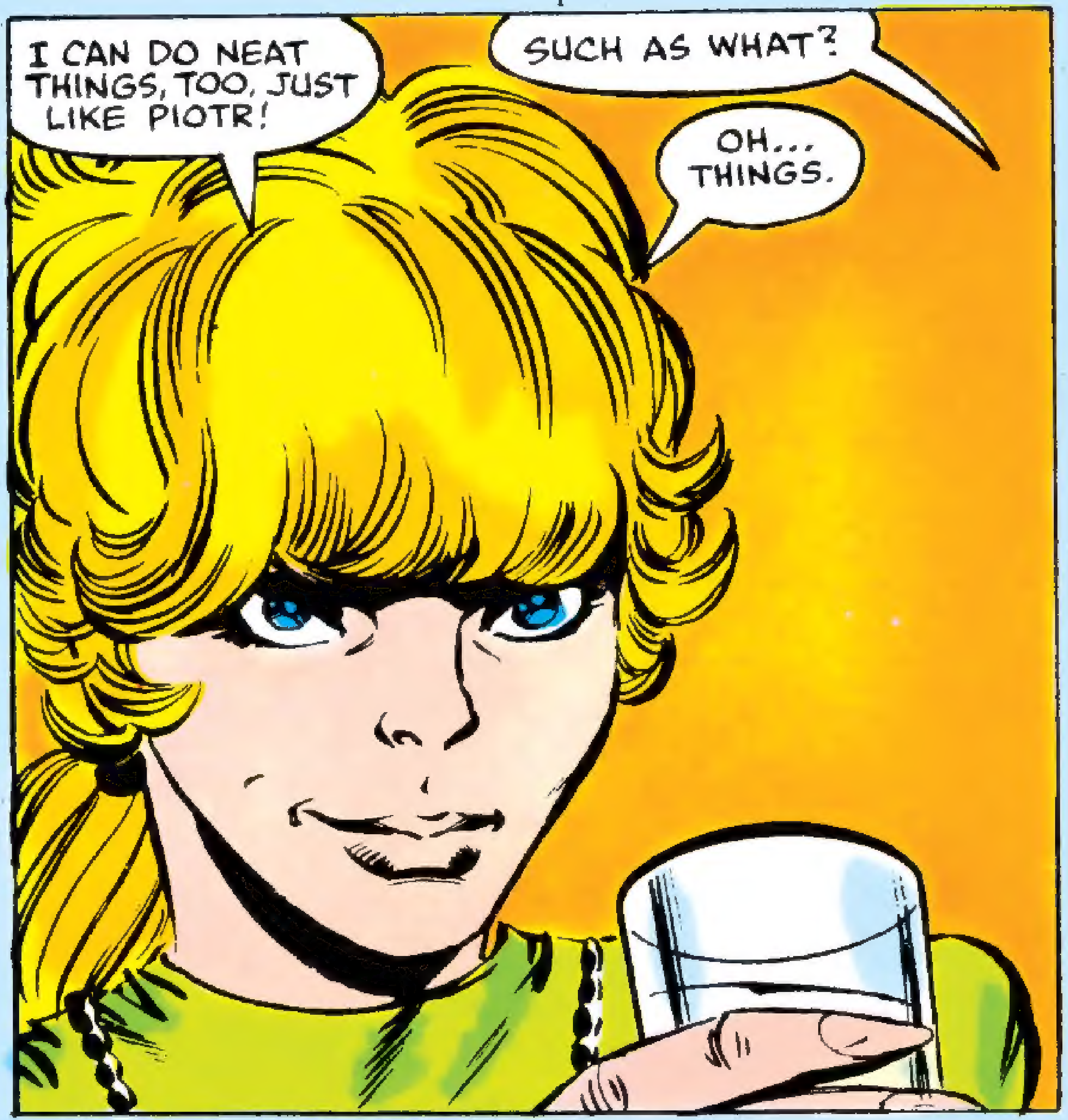
THE CREATION OF A NEW LIMITED SERIES
ILLYANA AND STORM

by Mark Lerer

Somewhere – somewhen – in the dark realm between planes of reality called Limbo, a malevolent sorcerer tempts an innocent girl. And the latest Marvel Limited Series is born! **ILLYANA AND STORM**, a four-part series from the creative nucleus that brings you **X-MEN** and **THE NEW MUTANTS**, chronicles the life of **Illyana Natalyanovna Rasputin**, kid sister of **X-Man, Colossus**, during the mysterious time she spent in the domain of the demon-lord **Belasco**.

Let's go back. Remember **X-MEN** #160? **Belasco**, banished to limbo by the dark gods he serves, magically abducted **Illyana** from the **X-Men's** care. He enticed her to stay with him by giving her a mystic amulet. He promised her a glorious destiny if she would learn from him mastery of the arcane arts. **The X-Men** had followed **Illyana** into Limbo, and after encountering strange, demonic versions of themselves, managed to rescue her. But, while literally tugging the girl out of one realm and into the other, **Kitty Pryde** lost her grip on **Illyana** momentarily. One brief moment in our dimension apparently corresponded to *seven years* in **Belasco's** world, for **Illyana** returned safely with our heroes to Earth a full seven years older!

Things got a little strange around Professor Xavier's School for Gifted Youngsters after that. The now-thirteen-year-old **Illyana** seemed as close as ever to her American family, but she confided in them precious little about the seven years she spent with **Belasco**. Mused **Kitty**, "I keep forgetting that she spent half of her life in a mystic limbo... She hardly ever speaks of that time, and we've never pressed her. I wonder if we'll learn... I wonder if we really *want* to!" We learned a little bit when Illyana dropped this hint to Professor Xavier:


I CAN DO NEAT THINGS, TOO, JUST LIKE PIOTR!
SUCH AS WHAT?
OH... THINGS.

Then, seven issues later, coyness gave way to terror! After seeing an image of **Belasco, Illyana** conjured a mystic sword and attacked **Kitty**, as if possessed by some dark demon!

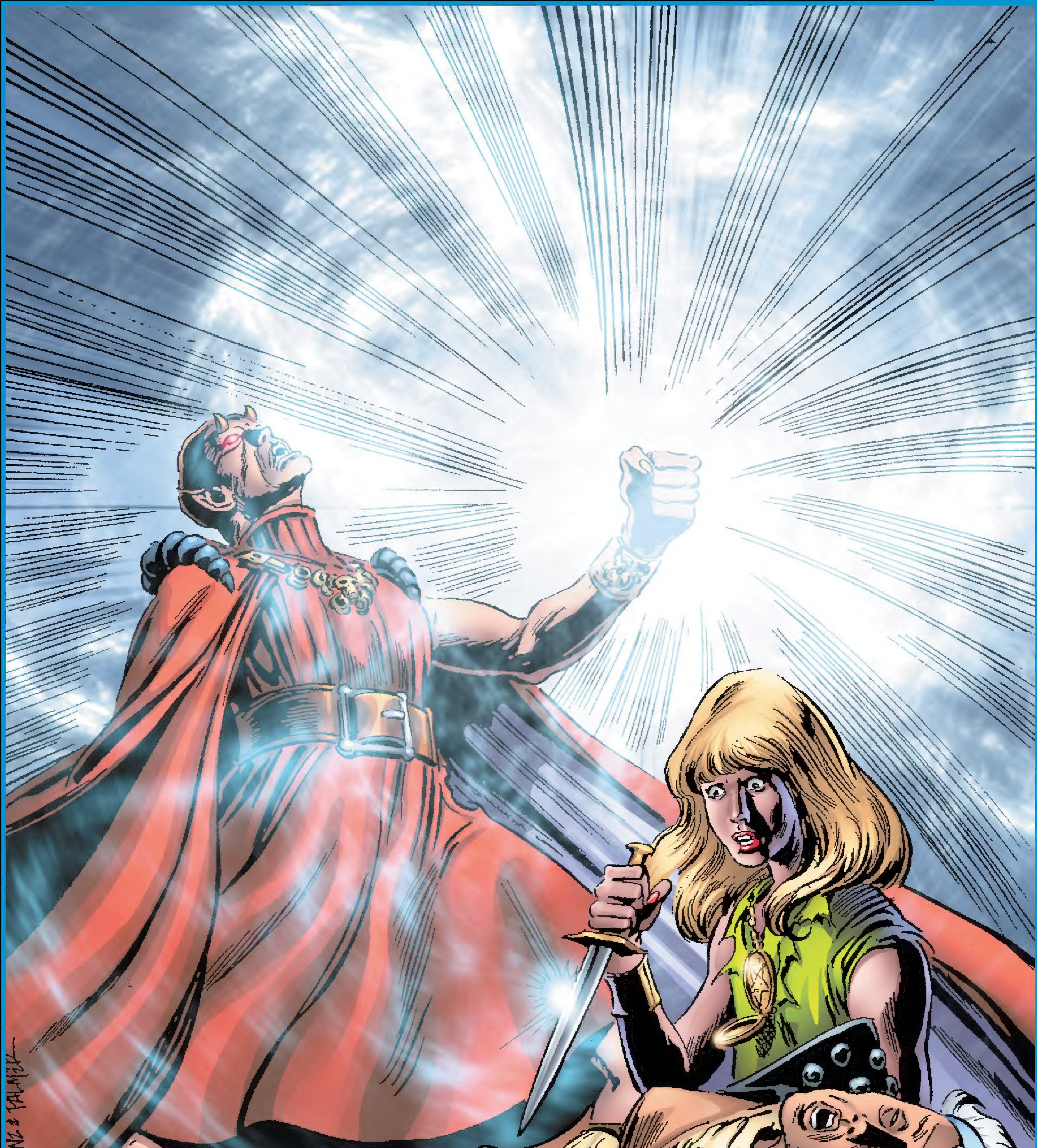
The other star of the Limited Series is the version of **Storm** that our heroes met in **Belasco's** Limbo. She is **Storm's** older self, a sorceress who has achieved command of the arts arcane. Meeting this future self has been a disturbing experience for "our" **Storm**. She has come to wonder what latent sorcerous talents she may possess in addition to her familiar mutant powers. And how could she ever learn to live and master sorcery in **Belasco's** realm when she knows how evil **Belasco** is?

ILLYANA AND STORM answers these questions. Set in Limbo during those mysterious seven years, it recounts the two heroine's experiences with sorcery, with **Belasco's** minions, and with the unpredictability of their true selves. Editor **Louise Jones** elaborated for us: "**Storm**, in her wisdom and maturity, encourages Illyana's involvement with Light sorcery, the magic of responsibility, of good. But there is a Dark sorcery, too – less benevolent, more dangerous, and more... *fun*. And remember that knowledge of any sorcery, Dark or Light, good or bad, will *corrupt*.

"Furthermore, **Illyana** and **Storm's** seven years are fraught with tragedy."

John Buscema will draw the series. **Tom Palmer**, one of the medium's most sought-after and influential craftsmen, will ink. **Chris Claremont**, the **X-Men** writer who knows the characters of **Illyana** and **Storm** inside out, will script. This fine creative ensemble promises a four-part adventure of high fantasy and drama unparalleled in the contemporary comics scene.

Watch for it!


FRENZ & PALMER

TOM PALMER

ILLYANA RASPUTIN, COLOSSUS' 7-YEAR-OLD SISTER — ABDUCTED BY BELASCO, DEMON LORD OF LIMBO!

Though the X-Men rescue her what seems like seconds later, those seconds represent a years-long ordeal for Illyana — one that starts with losing a piece of her soul, and goes downhill fast! The sorceress Ororo and feline warrior Cat — alternate-reality versions of X-Men Storm and Kitty Pryde — aid young Illyana against the terrors of Limbo, including Belasco's henchman S'ym and a twisted, perverse version of Nightcrawler. Trained in good and evil magic, Illyana learns to control Limbo's teleporting Stepping Discs — but as the final battle against Belasco arrives, can good triumph over evil when Illyana doesn't know which one she is anymore?

Collecting *Uncanny X-Men (1963) #160* and *Magik (1983) #1-4* — written by Chris Claremont; and illustrated by Brent Anderson, John Buscema, Ron Frenz and Sal Buscema.